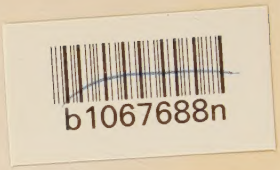
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EUGENE O'NEILL

DYNAMO

NEW YORK
HORACE LIVERIGHT
1929

812
On2dy

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CHARACTERS

REVEREND HUTCHINS LIGHT
AMELIA, his wife
REUBEN, their son
RAMSAY FIFE, superintendent of a hydro-electric plant
MAY, his wife
ADA, their daughter
JENNINGS, an operator at the plant

GENERAL SCENE

Act One

The exterior of the homes of the Lights and the Fifes in a small town in Connecticut. These houses stand side by side, facing front, on the street. They are separated by narrow strips of lawn, with a lilac hedge at center marking the boundary-line between the two properties, and a row of tall maples in the background behind the yards and the two houses. The Fife house, a small brownish-tinted modern stucco bungalow type, recently built, is at left; the Light home, a little old New England white frame cottage with green shutters, at right. Only the half sections of the two houses are visible which are nearest to each other, the one containing the Fife sitting room, with Ramsay's and May's bedroom directly above it, and the section of the Lights' home in which are their sitting room and Reuben's bedroom on the floor above.

As the separate scenes require, the front walls of these rooms are removed to show the different interiors. All these rooms are small, the ones in the Light home particularly so.

It is the month of May of the present day. The lilacs are in bloom, the grass is a fresh green.

SCENE 1—The Light sitting room and Reuben's bedroom above it.
SCENE 2—The Fife sitting room with Ramsay's and May's bedroom on the floor above.
SCENE 3—The Light and Fife sitting rooms.
SCENE 4—Reuben's bedroom.

Act Two

SCENE 1—Same as ACT ONE, SCENE ONE.
The Light sitting room.
Fifteen months later.
SCENE 2—Same as SCENE ONE, except that Reuben's bedroom is revealed.
SCENE 3—Exterior of the Light and Power Company's hydro-electric plant.
A half hour later.

Act Three

GENERAL SCENE: The Hydro-Electric Power Plant near the town.
Four months later.
SCENE 1—Exterior of the plant.
SCENE 2—Interiors of the upper and lower switch galleries.
SCENE 3—Interiors of the two switch galleries, the switchboard room, and the dynamo room.

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: *It is evening. In the background between the two houses the outlines of the maples are black against a sky pale with the light of a quarter-moon. Now and then there is a faint flash of lightning from far off and a low rumble of thunder.*

The LIGHT *sitting room and* REUBEN'S *bedroom are revealed. Both are sparsely furnished with the bare necessities.* REUBEN'S *bedroom contains an old four poster bed, front, facing left, a small table on which are stacked his textbooks, and a chair in left corner, front. In the left wall is a window. A washstand with bowl and pitcher is in the left corner, rear, and an old-fashioned bureau in the middle of the rear wall. To the right of this is the door of a clothes closet. The door to the hall and the stairs is at right, rear. There is a lighted kerosene lamp on the table.*

In the sitting room below there is a table at center, front. The minister's armchair is beside this on the left. His wife's rocker is at the right of the table. Farther right is another chair. Three

small hooked rugs are on the floor. Several framed prints of scenes from the Bible hang on the walls. The minister's small desk is placed against the left wall beside the window. On the table at center are a cheap oil reading lamp, a Bible, and some magazines. There is a door to the hall in the right wall, rear.

The ceilings of both rooms are low, the wall paper so faded that the ugliness of its color and design has been toned down into a neutral blur. But everything in this home is spotlessly clean and in order, the old furniture and floors are oiled and polished.

The Reverend Hutchins Light *is seated in his armchair, his wife in her rocker. He is a man in his early sixties, slightly under medium height, ponderously built. His face is square, ribbed with wrinkles, the forehead low, the nose heavy, the eyes small and gray-blue, the reddish hair grizzled and bushy, the stubborn jaw weakened by a big indecisive mouth. His voice is the bullying one of a sermonizer who is the victim of an inner uncertainty that compensates itself by being boomingly overassertive.*

His wife, Amelia, *is fifteen years his junior and appears even younger. Her stout figure is still firm and active, with large breasts and broad,*

round hips. She must have been pretty as a girl. Even now her dark-complected face, with its big brown eyes and wavy black hair, retains its attractiveness although it has grown fleshy. Her expression is one of virtuous resignation. Only her mouth is rebellious. It is a thin small mouth, determined and stubborn.

In the bedroom above, their son, REUBEN, *is sitting in his shirt sleeves on the side of his bed. He is seventeen, tall and thin. His eyes are large, shy and sensitive, of the same gray-blue as his father's. His mouth is like his father's. His jaw is stubborn, his thick hair curly and reddish-blond. He speaks timidly and hesitatingly, as a much younger boy might. His natural voice has an almost feminine gentleness. In intercourse with the world, however, he instinctively imitates his father's tone, booming self-protectively.*

HUTCHINS LIGHT *has a pad on which he has been trying to make notes for his next sermon, but his mind is abstracted. He stares before him with the resentful air of one brooding over a wrong done him and unsuccessfully plotting revenge. His wife is pretending to read, but her thoughts are actively elsewhere, and she glances calculatingly at her husband from under lowered lids.*

In the bedroom above, REUBEN'S *eyes are turned toward the window, his face eager with dreams.*

LIGHT

[*Arguing tormentedly within himself*]
What did he mean about Reuben? . . . that foul-mouthed scoundrel! . . . "Better call in your son or some night I might mistake his odor of sanctity for a skunk's and fill his" . . . filthy word belching from his grinning mouth! . . . "full of buckshot" . . . I heard the corner loafers laugh . . . and I had to slink by and pretend not to hear! . . . If it weren't for my cloth I'd have beaten his face to a bloody pulp! . . . I'd . . . [*Suddenly horrified at himself*]
A murderer's thoughts! . . . Lord God, forgive me! . . .

MRS. LIGHT

[*Glances at him and speaks in a gentle tone that carries a challenging quality*]
Hutchins, do you realize Reuben will graduate from school in less than a month?

LIGHT

[*Oblivious*]
But, Lord, Thou knowest what a thorn in the

flesh that atheist, Fife, has been since the devil brought him next door! . . .

[*Protesting petulantly to his God*]

How long, O Lord? . . . does not his foul ranting begin to try Thy patience? . . . is not the time ripe to smite this blasphemer who defies Thee publicly to strike him dead? . . . Lord God of Hosts, why dost Thou not strike him? . . . If Thou didst, I would proclaim the awful warning of it over all America! . . . I would convert multitudes, as it was once my dream to do! . . .

MRS. LIGHT

Hutchins, please pay attention to what I'm saying. Don't you think we ought to decide definitely about Reuben's future?

LIGHT

[*Turns to her with a frown*]

I have decided. He shall follow in my footsteps—mine and those of my father before me and his father before him. It is God's manifest will!

[*He presses his lips tightly together—an effort to appear implacable that gives his face the expression of a balky animal's*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Thinks scornfully*]
He is always so sure of what God wills! . . . but Reuben'll never be a minister if I can prevent it! . . . I'd rather see him dead than go through the poverty and humiliation I've had to face! . . . Reuben's got to go to college . . . then into business . . . marry a nice girl with money . . . he doesn't care anything about girls yet, thank goodness!
[*She speaks in a meek, persuasive tone*]

Each of us must judge about Reuben according to the light vouchsafed by God. He doesn't feel any call to the ministry and I think it would be a great sin if—

LIGHT

[*His voice booming*]
And I tell you, Amelia, it is God's will!

REUBEN

[*Hearing his father's voice, jumps to his feet and stares down toward the room with an expression of boyish apprehension*]
What's he shouting about? . . . has he heard about Ada and me? . . . he'll raise the roof! . . . but Mother'll take my side against him . . . she's always sided with me . . .

[*Then resentfully*]
What do I care about him anyway? . . . he hates Fife because he's scared of him . . . he's scared to take up Fife's challenge to debate about whether there's a God or not . . . when Fife took out his watch and said if there was a God let Him prove it by striking him dead in five minutes, why was it nothing happened? . . . I should think if . . .
[*He looks around uneasily, afraid of where his thoughts are leading him. A faint flash of lightning from the distant storm flickers through his window. He starts guiltily and hastily makes a reassuring declaration of faith*]
Of course there's a God . . . He wouldn't pay any attention to a fool like Fife, that's all . . .

LIGHT

I believe that storm must be coming this way.
[*He gets to his feet—a bit shamefacedly*]
I think I'll close the shutters.

MRS. LIGHT

But it'll make it so dreadfully close in here!
[*Then seeing his ashamed look, she smiles*]
Oh, all right, close them if you're getting scared.

LIGHT

[*His dignity ruffled, turns his back on her and goes to the window*]

Lightning gets on lots of people's nerves without their being afraid of it.

REUBEN

Aw, what's the matter with me? . . . that lightning had nothing to do with what I was thinking . . .

[*He goes to the window and looks over toward the* FIFE *home*]

Ada said she'd put a record on the Victrola as soon as she was free . . . then I was to meet her down by the lilacs . . .

[*He breathes in the spring*]

Gee, those lilacs smell sweet . . . I wish she'd hurry up . . . I've got to get up my nerve and tell her I love her . . .

LIGHT

[*Stands by the window and sniffs the air*]

Can you smell the perfume of the lilacs, Amelia? Do you remember our first spring here?

MRS. LIGHT

Of course.

[*Then, after a pause, her voice turned bitter*]

Twenty-three years! It's a long time to live in this

awful little house! Hutchins, are you ever going to insist that they install electric lighting here? It's a shame the way they deny you the ordinary comforts of life!

LIGHT

[*Turns away and leans out of the window staring into the night*]

Comforts of life . . . she has always desired the comfortable path . . . where the spirit decays in the sinful sloth of the flesh . . .

[*From the open, curtained windows of the* FIFE *living room a burst of laughter is heard—* FIFE'S *voice, sardonic and malicious.* LIGHT *draws back into the room, muttering viciously*]

Scum of the earth!

[*Then turning on his wife*]

Tell me, has Reuben been having anything to do with that cursed pack next door? That scoundrel called something at me on the street to-day—

MRS. LIGHT

[*Impatiently*]

Don't you know that man well enough by this time not to pay attention to his trying to rile you?

LIGHT

Then answer me this: why has Reuben taken such a sudden notion to going out in the evening lately?

MRS. LIGHT

Do you expect a boy of his age to stay in like a poor stick-in-the-mud just because he happens to be a minister's son—especially when it's spring?

LIGHT

I remembered that it's spring—and I've just remembered that Fife has a daughter!

MRS. LIGHT

That painted flapper with her skirts hitched up over her knees! Do you think for one moment that Reuben, who never looks at girls anyway—and knowing what her father is— Really, Hutchins, you're getting just too stupid!

[*From the* FIFE *house comes the sound of a Victrola starting a jazz record*]

REUBEN

[*Starts from his dream by the window upstairs*]

That's her signal! . . .

[*He hurriedly puts on his coat*]

I better sneak out the back . . .

[*He blows out the light and makes his way carefully out the bedroom door in right, rear*]

LIGHT

[*Listening to the Victrola, fixes his eyes on his wife combatively*]

You may call me as stupid as you like but I insist there was something back of what Fife said about Reuben. He sneered that we'd better keep him home at night and insinuated he was hanging around their place. The thought of that girl of his never entered my head until a moment ago—but what else could he mean? I'm going to face Reuben with it right now and we'll see what he has to say for himself.

MRS. LIGHT

[*Sharply*]

Now don't you go preaching at him again. You better let me talk to him first. He's never lied to me.

[*She goes toward the door in rear, plainly worried now but trying to make little of it*]

You're always so ready to believe the worst of him. I know it's all nonsense.

[*She goes out*]

LIGHT

[*Sits thinking gloomily*]
Never lied to her . . . she means he does to me . . . why? . . . have I been too stern? . . . but even when he was little I sensed in him his mother's rebellious spirit . . . and now . . . if it is Fife's daughter . . . what a feather in that blasphemer's cap to corrupt my son! . . . how the gossips would sneer at me! . . .
[*This thought drives him frantic—he paces up and down trying vainly to calm himself*]
No, no! . . . Reuben could never be guilty of so base a treachery! . . .
[*He sits down by the table and, picking up his Bible, begins to read in a determined effort to get his mind off the subject*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Can be dimly made out entering the bedroom above just as* REUBEN, *coming from the back door of the house, slinks stealthily around the rear corner across the patch of moonlit lawn to the shadow of the lilacs. Keeping in this shadow he moves down until he comes to a small gap that is almost at the end of the hedge, front. He stands by this, waiting nervously, peering through the gap at the* FIFE *house.*

MRS. LIGHT *thinks worriedly*]
Gone to bed? . . . so early? . . . was he sick and didn't tell me? . . .
[*She has come to the bed—with sudden fear*]
He's not here! . . . he sneaked out! . . . the first time he ever did such a thing! . . . but how do I know it's the first? . . . all the evenings I thought he was here studying . . . it can only mean one thing! . . . a girl! . . . not a good girl! . . . it must be that Fife girl! . . .
[*She goes to the window, peering out but keeping her head carefully inside—with fierce jealousy*]
That dirty little . . . I'd like to see her try to catch my Reuben! . . .
[*There is a strong flash of distant lightning that suddenly reveals* REUBEN *in his hiding place by the hedge. She gives a gasp*]
Oh! . . . there he is! . . . watching their house! . . . I'll just watch him and make sure. . . . Oh, Reuben, I can't believe it, you've never noticed girls! . . .

There is darkness for a moment—(as if the moon had passed behind a cloud)—to mark the end of SCENE ONE. *No time elapses between* SCENES ONE *and* TWO.

SCENE TWO: *When it grows light again the outer walls of the two rooms in the* LIGHT *home have been replaced, while the interiors of the* FIFE *sitting room and the couple's bedroom above it are now revealed. There is one small window on the top floor front of the* LIGHT *home, two on the ground floor.* MRS. LIGHT'S *head can be seen peering out of the side bedroom window at* REUBEN, *crouched in the shadow of the lilacs. The two rooms in the* FIFE *home, bright with all their electric lights on, are of a glaring newness. There is a table at center, front, in the sitting room, a Victrola in the rear corner, left, near the door in the left wall which leads to the hall. In the right wall are three windows looking out on the lawn toward the lilac hedge and the* LIGHT *home. These windows are repeated in the same series in the bedroom above. The bed is at left, front, its head against the left wall. In the same wall, to the rear of the bed, is the door. There is a dressing table with a big mirror against the rear wall, right, near the windows.*

RAMSAY FIFE *is seated at the left of the table, glancing through the pages of a technical book on Hydro-Electric Engineering. His wife is lying back in a chaise longue that she has pushed*

close to the windows on the right so she can stare out up at the sky.

FIFE *is a small wiry man of fifty, of Scotch-Irish origin, with a sharp face and keen black eyes. His thin mouth is full of the malicious humor of the practical joker. He has a biting tongue, but at bottom is a good-natured man except where the religious bigotry of his atheism is concerned. His wife is tall and stout, weighing well over two hundred. Her face must have once been one of those rosy-cheeked pretty doll-like faces and in spite of its fat, it has kept its girlish naïveté and fresh complexion. Her figure is not formless nor flabby. It suggests, rather, an inert strength. A mass of heavy copper-colored hair is piled without apparent design around her face. Her mouth is small with full lips. Her eyes are round and dark blue. Their expression is blank and dreamy. Her voice is sentimental and wondering. She is about forty years old.*

Their daughter, ADA, *sixteen, who is upstairs in the bedroom putting on a heavy make-up of rouge and mascara, resembles her father more than her mother. She has his alert quality. Her pretty face, with her mother's big blue eyes, is alive and keen, her mouth has a touch of her father's malicious humor. Her brown hair is*

boyishly bobbed. Her speech is self-assertive and consciously slangy. Beneath her flip talk, however, one senses a strong trace of her mother's sentimentality.

MRS. FIFE

[*Dreaming sentimentally*]
I hear Ada upstairs . . . she's primping up before my mirror . . . she's falling in love . . . it's nice to be in love in May . . . I love May better than any other month . . . May is when I first met Ramsay . . . it's warm tonight . . . I mustn't forget to make Ramsay change to his summer underwear this week . . . he always wears his heavies too long and gets prickly heat and then he's terrible cross . . .

FIFE

[*Reading—disgustedly*]
"Hydro-Electric engineering" . . . it's studying this stuff gives those stuck-up engineers their diplomas . . . "Frequency and number of phases" . . . "Inherent Regulations" . . . "Parallel Working" . . . "Wave Form" . . . diagrams and equations! . . . "The kinetic energy of a rotor of diameter D and axial length L, running at a speed of rotation *n*, is theoretically proportional to D4 Ln2" . . .

arrh! . . . the devil take their theories! . . . when anything goes wrong at the plant it's me who fixes it without any theory! . . .

[*He tosses the book on the table and speaks to his wife*]

I wish Townsend wouldn't go forcing his books on me, telling me I owe it to myself to pass for engineer's papers.

[*With a chuckle*]

Him arguing with me and at the same time admitting "Fife, you know a damn sight more about this game than I do."

MRS. FIFE

[*Mooning at him with adoring eyes*]

You know more than any one, Ramsay.

FIFE

[*Pleased but amused—teasing her as he would a big child*]

Oho, I do, do I? How the hell do you know?

[*Then complacently*]

Well, I do know more than most. There isn't a damn job in the game I haven't had a hand at sometime or another.

[*He looks at her and sees she is not listening any more*]

Look at her . . . in a dope dream again . . . I might as well be married to a cow . . .

[*Then amusedly*]

Well, she's a damn funny woman . . . I've never seen her equal anywhere . . .

[*He sees the newspaper on the table and reaches for it, glances at the headlines and settles down to reading with a grunt of awakened interest*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Has again fallen to dreaming sentimentally of the past*]

When I first met Ramsay he was a linesman . . . I loved him at first sight . . . he was so romantic looking with those steel climbing things on his legs . . . and he wore a colored handkerchief round his neck just like a cowboy . . . Pa and Ma warned me linesmen were no good . . . they just ruined you and went their way . . . they were wrong about Ramsay . . . except he did ruin me . . . I said, why is it wrong when I love him? . . . Pa yelled to get out, I'd disgraced the family . . . I never expected Ramsay'd marry me . . . he was the roving kind . . . but as soon as he knew he'd got me into trouble he spoke right up . . . "Oh, hell, then I guess I've got to marry you" . . . and I said yes, and I was

awful happy . . . and five months after Ada was born and he was crazy about her from the first . . . and we've all been happy ever since . . .

[*She sighs contentedly*]

ADA

[*In the bedroom above, finishes making up and inspects herself critically in the mirror—approvingly*]

I got to hand it to you, baby, you're there! . . . Gosh, how long is it since I put on that record? . . . Rube'll be waiting . . . he's as bashful as a kid . . . but that's what I like about him . . . I'm sick of these fresh guys that think all they have to do is wink and you fall! . . . Rube has got honest-to-God feelings . . . but of course, I'd never love him . . . he's too big a Mama's boy for me . . .

[*She goes to the door and puts her hand on the switch*]

Well, let's go . . . I'm dying to see if he'll have nerve enough to kiss me . . .

[*She turns out the light*]

REUBEN

[*Crouched by the hedge, gives a start as a flash of lightning flickers over the sky*]

Gosh, I wish Ada'd hurry up . . . this isn't

much fun . . . I'm losing all my nerve waiting . . .

MRS. LIGHT

[*Bending out of the window in* REUBEN'S *bedroom—in suspense between suspicion and hope*] She doesn't seem to be coming . . . maybe it's only some game he's playing . . . waiting to scare some friend of his . . .

FIFE

[*Looking up from his paper with a snort of disgust just as* ADA *enters the room*]

The bloody swinepot!

ADA

[*Comes and puts an arm around his shoulder —teasingly*]

What's the bad news, Pop? Has another Fundamentalist been denying Darwin?

FIFE

[*Boiling over with indignation, thrusting the paper on her, his finger pointing out the article*]

Read this and you won't joke about it!

[*As* ADA *begins to read, he speaks to his wife*]

Of all the yellow tricks!

MRS. FIFE

[*Coming out of her dream with a start*]

What, Ramsay?

FIFE

This story in the paper! There was a man in Ohio many years back killed another fellow in a fight about a girl. He got twenty years for it, but the girl helped him to escape and they both got clean away to the Coast, where he settled down under another name and they were married and had a daughter. He became one of the town's best citizens, and damned if his daughter didn't get engaged to the minister's son! Then, just before the wedding, the old man feels he's honor bound to tell his future son-in-law the secret of his past; so the damned idiot blathers the whole story of his killing the man and breaking jail! And what do you suppose that young skunk does? Breaks off with the girl and goes to the police with the story, saying he's bound by his conscience to squeal on him!

ADA

[*Who has finished reading the story*]

Phew! Some louse, that boy!

FIFE

Arrh! They're all the same, the Bible-punching breed!

[*Then with a touch of severity*]

And mind you bear that in mind, young lady, when you're fooling with that young ass next door!

ADA

Hey, listen, Pop! Honestly, I think you've got a nerve to— Why, it was you said to start up an acquaintance with him, when I told you I'd caught him staring at me, because you knew how it'd get his old man's goat!

FIFE

[*His sense of humor returning—with a malicious grin*]

Aye, it will that! I gave him a strong hint on the street to-day that upset him. Oh, if you'd only make a prize jackass of that yellow Nancy son of his!

ADA

Say, why have you got it in for Rube so? He's not to blame for his father.

[*Then hastily*]

Not that it's anything in my young life. I'm simply having fun kidding him along.

[*Then defensively again*]

But Rube's a good scout—in his way. He isn't yellow.

MRS. FIFE

[*Suddenly—with a placid certainty*]

You're falling in love, Ada.

ADA

[*Confused*]

Aw, Mom, where d'you get that stuff?

FIFE

[*Has glanced at her with suspicion*]

So you don't believe that lad's yellow, don't you? What'll you bet he isn't?

[*Then as she doesn't answer*]

I dare you to bring him in to-night, and let me talk to him and you listen, and if I don't show him up yellow then I'll buy you the best dress you can find in the town!

[*As she hesitates—tauntingly*]

Are you afraid to take me up?

ADA

[*With defensive flippancy, turns to go*]

I'll think about it. There's a dress in Steele's I've had my eye on.

[*She goes out the door at left*]

FIFE

[*Looks after her—frowning*]
She acts queer about him . . . it's time I took a hand in this . . . I've got to fix up a scheme on him quick . . . she'll bring him back if she has to drag him . . .

ADA

[*Has come out of the house by the front door, off left, and enters from the left, then hesitates for a moment, debating with herself*]
Shall I make him come in? . . . he'll be scared stiff! . . . but Pop was only bluffing . . . well, I'll just call his bluff! . . . he can't get away with that stuff with me! . . .
[*She walks toward the gap in the hedge*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Can see her now from the window*]
There she comes . . . the little harlot! . . .

ADA

[*Calling*]
Rube.

REUBEN

[*Comes through the hedge to her—sheepishly*]
Hello, Ada.

[*Then, as he stands beside her, looking down into her face, a sudden thrill of desire almost overcomes his timidity*]

Gosh, Ada,—you're pretty in the moonlight. I—I wish—

[*His courage fails him—lamely*]

It's certainly grand to-night, isn't it?

ADA

Yeah. It's great.

[*She takes one of his hands*]

Come on in my house and meet Pop. I want you to see he isn't the devil out of hell your old man makes him out to be.

REUBEN

[*Immediately terrified*]

I can't, Ada! You know I can't. Why don't we walk the same as—

ADA

I'm sick of walking.

[*As he still holds back—tauntingly*]

Are you scared Pop will eat you? You make me sick, Rube!

REUBEN

It's not because I'm scared of your father; it's because—

ADA

Afraid your Mama would spank you if she found out?

[*Then as he still hesitates*]

Oh, very well, you know what you can do, don't you?

[*She turns her back on him and walks away*]

REUBEN

Ada! Wait a minute! Please don't get sore! I'll come!

ADA

Good boy!

[*She suddenly raises herself on tiptoe and kisses him—with a little laugh*]

There! That's to help keep your nerve up!

REUBEN

[*A wave of passion coming over him, grabs her by the shoulders and bends his face close to hers*]

Ada!

ADA

Ouch! That hurts, Rube!

REUBEN

I don't care if it does! I love you, Ada!

[*He tries to kiss her*]

ADA

[*Struggling away from him*]

Hey, cut it out! What do you think I am?

[*Then, as, brought back to himself, he releases her in shamefaced confusion, she adds tartly, her confidence restored and her temper a bit ruffled*]

Listen here, Rube, just because I kissed you in fun, don't get too fresh!

REUBEN

[—I didn't mean nothing bad—honest I didn't!

ADA

All right, only don't get rough again.

[*Taking his hand—in a bullying tone*]

Come on. Let's go in.

[*Reuben follows her off left mechanically, a look of growing dread on his face*]

MRS. LIGHT

She kissed him! . . . the brazen little harlot! . . . where is she taking him? . . . I've got to stop her! . . .

[*She draws back quickly from the window and can be made out going hurriedly from the bedroom*]

FIFE

[*Irritably*]

May the devil kill me if I can think up a good scheme . . .

[*He turns his exasperation on his wife*]

How can I think in the same room with you? It's like trying to swim in glue! For God's sake, get out of here!

MRS. FIFE

[*Raises herself to her feet placidly, without a trace of resentment*]

I'll go upstairs and read the paper.

FIFE

[*Starts to thrust the paper on her*]

Here you are then!

[*But as he does so his eye lights on the same headline that had attracted his attention before and suddenly he has an inspiration and grins elatedly*]

By God, I've got it, May! I'll try that on him! All the pious folks in this town think I've a bad record behind me—

[*He pushes the paper into her hands*]

Get out of here quick! I don't want you around to give me away!

[*She goes out. He waits, looking at the door, a grin of malicious expectancy on his face. At this moment* MRS. LIGHT, *who has come out by her kitchen door, appears around the corner of her house and slinks hurriedly across the patch of lawn to the shadow of the lilacs at the extreme edge of the hedge, front*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Peers stealthily around the corner of the hedge down the street—in an extreme state of agitation*]

I can't see them . . . they're hiding somewheres . . . she'll be kissing him . . . oh, just wait till I tell her what I think of her! . . .

[*She starts out of the shadow of the lilacs as if to go down the street but the brightness of the moonlight frightens her and she moves quickly back into the shadow*]

Supposing any one should see me . . . oh, I don't know what to do! . . . that nasty wicked boy! . . . he'll be punished good for this! . . .

There is darkness again for a moment, to mark the end of SCENE TWO. *No time elapses between* SCENES TWO *and* THREE.

SCENE THREE: *When the light comes on again, the wall of the* FIFE *bedroom has been replaced.*

Their sitting room is revealed as before with FIFE *still sitting looking expectantly at the door. And now the interior of the* LIGHT *sitting room is again shown with* LIGHT *sitting as at the end of* SCENE ONE. *He holds the open Bible but he is staring moodily over it.* MRS. LIGHT, *as before, is hiding in the shadow of the lilac hedge, peering down the road, ashamed of her position and afraid she will be discovered.*

LIGHT

[*Thinking gloomily*]
I must be honest with myself . . . who am I to cast the first stone at Reuben if he desires a woman? . . . hasn't my love for Amelia been one long desire of the senses? . . . I should understand Reuben's weakness and forgive him . . .
[*Then his resentment smoldering up*]
But to betray me to Fife! . . . that would go deeper! . . . it would be treachery to God! . . .

MRS. FIFE

[*Leans out of the front window of the bedroom upstairs*]
I don't want to read the paper . . . I'd rather look at the moon . . .
[*Mooning up at the moon*]

Ada loves that Light boy . . . he must be nice . . . he isn't to blame because his father believes in religion . . . maybe his father is nice too if you got to know him off the job . . . Ramsay is always so cranky when he's at the plant . . . I love the plant . . . I love the dynamos . . . I could sit forever and listen to them sing . . . they're always singing about everything in the world . . .

[*She hums to herself for a moment—an imitation of the whirring purr of a dynamo*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Hearing this noise, looks up around the corner of the hedge and sees her and immediately dissolves into abject shame and fright*]

Oh, my God! . . . did she see me? . . . she'll tell the whole town I was spying! . . . oh, this is terrible! . . . I ought to get Hutchins . . . but I can't move while she's watching . . .

FIFE

[*Standing up and looking at the door*]

Ada's a long time bringing him . . . there's a lot of whispering in the hall . . . he's afraid, I'm thinking . . . about to enter the presence of Satan . . . I'll have to start in making him think I'm the devil himself! . . .

[ADA *comes in the doorway of the sitting room, left, followed by* REUBEN]

FIFE

[*Without waiting for an introduction, goes up and shakes* REUBEN'S *hand with an exaggerated cordiality*]

So you're young Mr. Light, are you? I'm damned glad to make your acquaintance. Sit down and make yourself at home.

[*All the time he is talking, he stares at* REUBEN'S *flustered face, keenly sizing him up. He forces him to sit in the chair across the table from him.* ADA *sits down at right, watching her father with a challenging smile*]

REUBEN

[*Stammers*]

Pleased to meet you. Thank you. Thanks.

FIFE

[*With a sudden change to severity*]

I want a damned serious talk with you, young man! That's why I had Ada invite you in!

[*As* REUBEN *stares at him bewilderedly*]

But before we start that, let me ask you, is your

reverend father ever going to take up my challenge to debate with me?

REUBEN

[*Shamefacedly*]

I—I don't think so.

FIFE

[*Jeeringly*]

He's afraid I'd beat him!

REUBEN

[*Defensively*]

No, he isn't! He can answer all your arguments easy—with things right out of the Bible! He's only scared that folks'd think he was wrong to argue with you!

[*Then raising his voice defiantly*]

But I'd argue if I was in his place!

MRS. LIGHT

[*From her hiding place by the hedge has caught* REUBEN's *raised voice—with horrified stupefaction*]

That was Reuben's voice! . . . he's actually in there talking to that atheist! . . . oh, I wish I could get closer to the window! . . . but she'd see me! . . .

[*But she comes around the end of the hedge as far as she can get and strains her ears*]

FIFE

[*Smiling mockingly at* REUBEN]

Well, maybe after you're a minister you and me'll argue it out sometime.

REUBEN

[*Glad to make a show of his independence before* FIFE]

I'm not going to be a minister! Father wants me to but Mother doesn't—and I don't want to be. Besides, I've never felt the call. You have to feel God calling you to His service.

FIFE

[*With a leer*]

And how does God call you, tell me? I'm thinkin' He wouldn't use the telegraph or telephone or radio for they're contraptions that belong to His archenemy Lucifer, the God of Electricity.

[REUBEN's *face has flushed with mingled indignation and fear. He looks up at the ceiling apprehensively, then opens his mouth to make some retort to* FIFE *when there is a vivid flash of lightning. He gives a start and half rises*

from his chair, controlling an impulse to run from the room. FIFE's *keen eyes are watching him and he grins with satisfaction*]

REUBEN

[*Stammers*]
You better not—talk like that, or—you better look out!

FIFE

What's the trouble, young fellow? Are you afraid of a bit of lightning? Don't worry about me. The devil looks after his own! But a minister's son has reason to worry, maybe, when he's in a den of atheism, holding intimate converse with a damned man! I'm thinking your Jehovah might aim a thunderbolt at me but Lucifer would deflect it on to you—and he's the better electrical expert of the two, being more modern in his methods than your God!

REUBEN

[*In a turmoil of guilt and fright*]
I wish I'd never come here! . . . God may strike him! . . . He certainly ought to! . . . if I was God, I'd kill him for blaspheming like that! . . .

ADA

[*Observing* REUBEN—*worriedly*]
Why did the poor boob let Pop get wise he was scared of lightning? . . .
[*Then indignantly*]
Pop has no right to pick on religion! . . . that's hitting below the belt! . . .
[*Protestingly*]
Aw, Pop, lay off religion, can't you!

FIFE

[*Glances at her irritably—then with a calculating tone to* REUBEN]
Ada's right, Mr. Light. I didn't have you in to convert you to atheism. This is a free country and you're free to believe any God-forsaken lie you like —even the book of Genesis!
[*Then solemnly*]
But here's what I did have you in for, and I'll come right to the point. As a father I want to know what your intentions are regarding my daughter!
[REUBEN *stares at him in open-mouthed amazement*]

ADA

[*Embarrassed but cannot help a giggle of amusement when she looks at* REUBEN]
Aw, Pop, what—

FIFE

Keep your tongue out of this!

[*Sternly to* REUBEN]

I trust you mean honorably by her, young fellow, or it'll be the worse for you! I'll have no young spark seducing my daughter—getting her with child, maybe, and then deserting her with no marriage lines to save her from disgrace!

[ADA *begins to see this as a huge joke and she has to bury her face in her hands to choke back her laughter as she looks at* REUBEN'S *face on which is at first a shocked look of stupefaction. But this gives way to a fit of indignation that any one could think him so low*]

REUBEN

What do you think I am? You have no right to say that about me! I'm not that kind of—

[*Then his voice booming like his father's with moral self-righteousness*]

I respect Ada just as much as I do my mother! I'm going to marry her!

ADA

[*Genuinely flustered—trying to laugh it off*]

Gee, Rube, did I say you had no nerve? I take it all back!

[REUBEN'S *nerve immediately deserts him. He hangs his head in acute embarrassment, his eyes on the floor*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*By the end of the hedge*]
Marry her! . . . I heard it clear as day! . . . respect her like he does me! . . . damn her! . . . Oh, I didn't mean to swear! . . . I don't know what I'm doing! . . .
[*Then weeping hysterically and trying to stifle it*]
Oh, I'll get Hutchins to beat him within an inch of his life! . . .
[*She sinks down on the ground, her hands over her face*]
I've got to stop! . . . she'll hear me up there! . . . she'll tell how I was crying! . . .

MRS. FIFE

[*Has noticed the noise of* MRS. LIGHT'S *movements and looks down vaguely*]
Some animal's in the garden . . . maybe it's a skunk . . . I'd love to have a skunk skin coat next winter . . . maybe Ramsay'll give me one for Christmas . . . Ramsay calls the minister a skunk . . . poor Mr. Light! . . . Ramsay says awful mean things sometimes . . . but it's

only because he loves to make jokes . . . he's the kindest man in the world . . .

FIFE

[*Pretending to be sunk in thought has been staring calculatingly at* REUBEN—*solemnly*]

Young man, I'll be honest with you. In view of your ionorable intentions I feel bound by my conscience o let you know the secret of the family you're want- ng to marry into. But you must give me your word f honor, as man to man—I don't ask you to swear n the Bible—that you'll never repeat what I'm say- ng to any one, no matter how dreadful it seems to ou! Will you give me your word?

REUBEN

[*Made visibly uneasy but forcing a manly tone*]

Sure. I wouldn't ever say anything.

ADA

[*Leaning forward in her chair and watching her father worriedly*]

What's Pop going to spring? . . . Rube's looking pale behind the gills, poor guy! . . . aw, poor nothing! . . . he ought to have more guts! . . .

FIFE

[*With a tragic sigh*]

There's not a living soul knows it, barring my wife and Ada. It's like putting my life in your hands. You know, don't you, that no one knows what I done before I came to this town, nor where I came from. I've good reason for keeping it dark. Listen now. Twenty years ago there was a man by the name of Andrew Clark lived in the town of Arming, Ohio.

[*He pauses significantly, giving a quick side glance at* ADA *to see if she's caught the joke—then goes on with a guilty furtiveness—lowering his voice*]

Now Clark was in love with a girl whose family had got her engaged to another fellow, but she loved Clark and used to meet him in the woods. But this fellow who was engaged to her got suspicious and one night he sneaked up on them lying in each other's arms—in sin, as you'd call it—and he rushed out with a knife at them both, but Clark picked up an ax and split his skull!

[*He finishes up with well-feigned savagery*]

And serve him right, the bloody sneak!

REUBEN

[*Stares at* FIFE *with horror*]

You mean—Clark murdered him?

FIFE

[*With a great pretense of guilt-stricken protest*]

Oh, don't say that! Not murder! He killed him in self-defense! Wouldn't you do the same if Ada was the girl and you was Clark?

REUBEN

What is he asking? . . . Ada? . . . would I? . . .

[*Then his horror turning to a confused rage*]

I'd kill Ada if I caught her! . . . but it was the other man who caught! . . . and they were engaged, too! . . . she belonged to him! . . .

[*Harshly and condemningly—in his father's tone*]

That other fellow should have killed them, that's what I think! That girl was engaged to the other fellow! She had no right to love Clark! That wasn't love, it was lust! She was an adulteress! It would have been only her just punishment if that fellow had killed her! I would have!

FIFE

For the love of God, don't be so hard on me—for what I was coming to tell you was that I was Clark!

[*As if to punctuate this dramatic confession, there is a flash of lightning, brighter than any that has gone before*]

REUBEN

[*Clutches the arms of his chair in superstitious terror, all the passion drained out of him instantly, leaving him weak and penitent*]
Oh, God, please forgive me! . . . I didn't mean it! . . . I wouldn't ever kill her! . . .
[*Then glacing at* FIFE *with fear*]
He's a murderer! . . . he said himself he was damned! . . .

FIFE

[*Eyeing* REUBEN *keenly*]
After I'd killed him I gave myself up. The jury said it was murder in the second degree and gave me twenty years—but I fooled 'em with the help of the girl and escaped and we both ran off to the far west and settled down in Niclum, California, and I married her under the name of Fife and we had a daughter. That's Ada.

REUBEN

[*Keeping his eyes averted from* ADA]
Then that's her mother! . . . she's the daugh-

ter of an adulteress! . . . and a murderer! . . . how can I ever trust her? . . . she's gone around with lots of fellows . . . how do I know she never—? . . .

[*Then torturedly*]

Oh, God, why did I ever come here tonight? . . .

FIFE

[*With a great pretense of uneasiness*]

You don't say a word. Well, maybe I shouldn't have told you, because now I've made you an accessory in the murder for you'll be shielding me unlawfully by keeping silence. And the devil knows what sin you'll think it in the sight of God!

[*The clap of thunder from the preceding flash comes with a great rumble*]

REUBEN

Accessory! . . . the police can arrest me! . . .

[*Then summoning his manhood*]

but I won't tell them! . . . ever! . . . I gave my word! . .

[*Then conscience-strickenly*]

but God! . . . I'll be guilty before God! . . . but He knows I gave my word! . . . but does that count with Him? . . . when I didn't swear on the Bible? . . .

[*Then frantically*]
But He knows I love Ada . . . He wouldn't want me to tell on her father . . .
[*He suddenly jumps up and mumbles to* FIFE]
I won't tell the police, you needn't worry.

ADA

[*With a triumphant glance at her father*]
Good for you, Rube!

REUBEN

[*Avoiding her eyes*]
I've got to go home now.

FIFE

[*Searching* REUBEN'S *face—insistently*]
I'm sorry to put such a load on your conscience, Mr. Light, but I felt it was only right of me.

REUBEN

Why does he rub it in? . . . God, I hate him! . . . I wish they'd hung him! . . .
[*Angrily—his voice booming denouncingly like his father's*]
You needn't be afraid I'll tell—but you ought to go and tell yourself! You know you're guilty in the sight of God! Do you want to burn forever in hell?

FIFE

[*Jeeringly*]

Your hell and God mean no more to me than old women's nonsense when they're scared of the dark!

REUBEN

Don't you dare talk like that! I won't stand for it—not now! If you don't stop your blaspheming, I'll —I mean, it'd serve you right if I—

[*Hurrying toward the door as if in flight*]

I got to get home.

[*He stops at the door and turns to* ADA, *but keeps his eyes averted*]

Good night, Ada.

[*He goes out*]

ADA

He was threatening Pop already he'd tell on him! . . . gee, he is yellow all right! . . .

[*Tears of mortification and genuine hurt come to her eyes—she brushes them back*]

Aw, what do I care about him? . . .

FIFE

[*With a chuckle*]

He'll be blabbin' my dreadful secret to his old man yet, wait and see!

ADA

[*To his surprise, turns on him angrily*]

It wasn't fair! He never had a chance!

[*She flings herself on the chaise longue and begins to cry*]

FIFE

[*Stares at her in astonishment*]

Are you turning against me—for that lump!

[*Then he comes and pats her on the shoulder*]

I was only doing it for your sake, Ada. You ought to see him in his true colors so you'd not be thinking too much about him.

ADA

[*Forces back her tears and jumps up*]

I didn't think anything! Leave me alone about him, can't you?

[*With a great pretense of indifference she gets a book from the table and sits down again*]

I should worry about that poor fish! I've got to study my algebra.

[*Her father stares at her puzzledly. There is a bright flash of lightning and* LIGHT, *sitting as before in the sitting room of the other house reading the Bible, jumps nervously to his feet*]

LIGHT

I ought to conquer that silly fear in myself . . . the lightning is God's will . . . what on earth can Amelia be doing with Reuben all this time? . . .

[*He listens for a moment—uneasily*]

I'll go upstairs to them . . . she should be more considerate than to leave me alone when . . .

[*He walks toward the door on right*]

There is a pause of darkness here to mark the end of SCENE THREE. *In this darkness the clap of thunder from the preceding flash comes. No time elapses between* SCENES THREE *and* FOUR.

SCENE FOUR: *When the light comes on again—but this time very dimly, as if the moon were behind clouds—the walls of the* FIFE *and* LIGHT *sitting rooms have been replaced while the interior of* REUBEN'S *bedroom is now revealed.* MRS. FIFE *still leans out of her bedroom window and* MRS. LIGHT *sits crouching by the hedge.*

MRS. LIGHT

[*Suddenly jumping to her feet and peering up through the leaves at* MRS. FIFE]

Oh, God, isn't she ever going in? . . . I'll scream in a minute! . . .

MRS. FIFE

I love to watch lightning . . . the thunder clouds are getting nearer the moon . . . I'd like to be a cloud . . . it must be nice to float in the wind . . . but it must be getting bedtime . . .

[*She slowly backs herself into her room*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*As* MRS. FIFE *disappears*]

Now I can get Hutchins . . .

[*She slinks back along the hedge and then quickly across the lawn around the corner of her house just as* REUBEN *enters from the left by the* FIFE *house*]

REUBEN

[*Stands hesitating—uneasily*]

I thought I'd walk around and think up some lie . . . Mother'll guess something is wrong as soon as she looks at me . . . but I'm not going to stay out in the storm . . .

[*He walks slowly over to where he had stood with* ADA—*dully*]

Here's where she kissed me . . . why couldn't

we have gone for a walk? . . . she'd have let me kiss her . . . I'd have had her in my arms . . . like her mother was with Clark? . . . no, I didn't mean that! . . . I didn't mean sin! . . .

[*Then with desperate bravado*]

Aw, what is sin, anyway? . . . maybe that's just old women's nonsense, like Fife says! . . . why should I have a guilty conscience? . . . it's God's fault! . . . why hasn't He done something to Fife? . . . I should think He'd have to punish adultery and murder . . . if there is any God . . .

[*There is a great flash of lightning and he stands paralyzed with superstitious terror*]

It comes every time! . . . when I deny! . . .

[*More and more obsessed by a feeling of guilt, of being a condemned sinner alone in the threatening night*]

Fife's damned me with him! . . . there's no use praying! . . . it's getting black! . . . I'm afraid of God! . . .

[*There is a crash of thunder. He cowers, trembling—then cries like a frightened little boy*]

Mother! Mother!

[*He runs off right, forgetting that he has sneaked out by the back, making for the front door. At the same moment* Light *can be dimly*

made out as he enters REUBEN'S *bedroom, and* FIFE *sticks his head out of his sitting-room window and looks toward the* LIGHT *home*]

FIFE

That was him I heard passing . . . I'll wait here and watch the fun . . .
[*He chuckles to himself*]

LIGHT

[*Pauses just inside Reuben's bedroom door in alarm at finding the room dark and empty—calls uneasily*]
Amelia! Reuben!
[*He lights a match with trembling fingers and hurries over to the lamp and lights it. His wife's voice comes excitedly from below and then from the stairs in the hallway*]

MRS. LIGHT

Hutchins! Hutchins! Where are you?

LIGHT

[*Hurries to the door calling*]
Here—upstairs.

MRS. LIGHT

[*A moment later hurries in excitedly, her words pouring out*]

Oh, Hutchins, something awful has happened—that Fife girl—I heard Reuben asking Fife if he could marry her!

[LIGHT, *completely stunned, stares at her blankly. There is the noise of the front door being slammed and* REUBEN'S *voice calling desperately*]

REUBEN

Mother! Where are you?

MRS. LIGHT

Sshh! Let him come up here.

[*Pushing him toward the closet in rear*]

You hide in that closet and listen! I'll make him acknowledge everything! He'd only lie to you!

[*Vindictively*]

I promise I won't stand between him and punishment this time!

[*She gives him a final shove inside the door and closes it*]

REUBEN

[*His voice comes from the hall as he rushes upstairs*]

Mother!

[*A second later he runs in and, too distracted to notice her expression, throws his arms around her*]

Mother!

[*He breaks down and sobs*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Alarmed by the state he is in, puts her arms around him, her immediate reaction one of maternal tenderness. She leads him front and sits on the side of the bed*]

There, there! It's all right, Reuben! Mother's here!

[*Then indignantly*]

What have those awful people been doing to my boy to get him in such a state?

[*As he gives a start—sharply*]

Now don't deny you were there! Don't make matters worse by lying! What happened between you and that man? Tell Mother!

REUBEN

[*Brokenly*]

I can't! I promised him I wouldn't. I can't tell any one!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Changing to a tone of wheedling affection*]
Yes you can, Reuben. You can always tell Mother everything. You always have.

REUBEN

[*Clinging to her*]
I love Mother better'n anything in the world . . . she always forgives me . . . I wish I could tell her . . . she'd know what was right . . .
[*There is a bright flash of lightning. He shrinks closer to her and blurts out*]
I'm scared, Mother! I'm guilty! I'm damned!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Startled*]
Guilty? . . . does he mean he? . . .
[*With sudden strong revulsion*]
And to think he's had those same arms hugging that little filthpot this very evening! . . .
[*She pushes him away, but, holding his shoulders, stares down into his face*]
Do you mean to say you refuse to tell your own mother, just because you were forced into promising not to by that atheist? Then all I can say is that my boy I thought I could trust has turned into a liar and

a sneak, and I don't wonder you feel guilty in God's sight!

[*As she finishes speaking, the roll of the thunder from the preceding flash comes crashing and rumbling.* REUBEN *sinks down on his knees beside her, hiding his face in her lap*]

REUBEN

[*Stammers*]

I'll tell you, Mother—if you promise to keep it a secret—just between me and you—and never tell Father.

MRS. LIGHT

All right. I'll promise.

REUBEN

[*Made uneasy by something in her tone—insistently*]

You'll swear it on the Bible?

MRS. LIGHT

Yes, I'll swear on the Bible I won't tell him.

REUBEN

[*In a passion of eagerness to get the guilty tale off his conscience*]

His name isn't even Fife, it's Clark! He changed it because he'd murdered a man out in Ohio where he used to live. He got twenty years but he escaped and ran away to California! Fife's a murderer, that's what he really is!

[*While he has been telling this story, the closet door has opened and* LIGHT *stands there, listening greedily. In his hand is a belt of* REUBEN'S]

LIGHT

[*Thinking with a fierce, revengeful joy*]

Lord God of Righteous Vengeance, I thank Thee! . . . at last Thou strikest! . . .

MRS. LIGHT

[*Dumbfounded, not knowing what to make of this strange tale—and disappointed that it is not a confession about* ADA]

Wherever did you get hold of this story?

REUBEN

He told me himself.

MRS. LIGHT

Do you expect me to believe Fife's such an idiot as to confess such things to you?

REUBEN

He had a good reason to tell me! I asked him if I could marry Ada and he thought he was honor bound to tell me! He knew it'd be safe with me when I gave him my word—

[*Then thinking with guilty shame*]

But I've told! . . . I've just told! . . . why did I? . . . Oh, how Ada would hate me if she knew! . . .

[*Pleadingly*]

Remember you swore on the Bible you'd never tell! Remember, Mother!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Glaring into his face vindictively*]

So you want to marry that little harlot, do you?

REUBEN

[*Shakes her hands off his shoulders—shrinking back from her, still on his knees*]

Don't you say that, Mother! I love Ada, Mother! I love her with all my heart!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Calls over her shoulder*]

Do you hear that, Hutchins?

LIGHT

[*Grimly*]

Yes, I hear.

[*He takes a threatening step forward*]

REUBEN

Father!

[*Then his eyes turn to his mother's vindictive face and he thinks in a tortured agony of spirit*]

He was hiding in the closet! . . . she knew it! . . . she cheated me! . . . when I trusted her! . . . when I loved her better than any one in the world! . . .

[*He cries out in a passion of reproach*]

Oh, Mother! Mother!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Misunderstanding this as a plea*]

No, you needn't think I'm going to get you off this time! You punish him good, Hutchins! The very idea—kissing that dirty little—!

REUBEN

Don't you say that!

LIGHT

[*Walks toward him*]

Hold your tongue! How dare you address your mother—!

REUBEN

[*His thoughts whirling in his head*]

Mother's face . . . she looks terrible . . . she wants him to beat me . . . she wants to hear me yell . . .

[*Then with a defiant determination as if some hidden strength in him had suddenly been tapped*]

But I won't give her the satisfaction! . . . no matter how it hurts! . . .

LIGHT

Let this put back the fear of God into your sinful heart, Reuben!

[*He brings the belt down heavily across* REUBEN'S *back.* REUBEN *quivers but not a sound comes from his lips. At the same moment there*

is a glaring flash of lightning and LIGHT *cringes back with a frightened exclamation*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Has winced when* REUBEN *was hit—conscience-strickenly*]
That must have hurt dreadfully! . . . poor Reuben! . . .
[*Then with an exasperated sense of frustration, gazing at* REUBEN'S *set face*]
Why doesn't he cry? . . . if he'd cry I'd stop Hutchins . . . that girl has changed him! . . .

REUBEN

[*Expecting the next blow, thinking with a grim elation*]
Come on! . . . hit again! . . . hit a million times! . . . you can't make me show her you hurt me! . . .
[*Then stealing a glance up at his father's face*]
He looks scared! . . . it was that lightning! . . . I'll never be scared of lightning again! . . .
[*Then resolutely*]
I'll be damned if I'm going to let him beat me! . . .
[*He jumps to his feet and faces his father defiantly*]

LIGHT

[*Guiltily*]

I can't bear him looking at me like that . . . I really ought to feel grateful to him . . . his folly has delivered Fife into my hands . . .

[*He throws the belt on the bed—to his wife*]

Reuben's punishment can wait. I have my duty of denouncing that murderer to the proper authorities.

[*Triumphantly*]

Haven't I always said, if the truth were known, that man was a criminal!

[*Turning toward the door*]

Keep Reuben here. He might warn Fife. I'll lock this door after me.

[*Then hurriedly, as a crash of thunder comes*]

I must hurry. I want to get to the police station before the rain.

[*He shuts the door behind him and locks it*]

REUBEN

[*Staring after him with the same look of defiance—calls jeeringly*]

Look out for the lightning!

[*Then he turns to his mother with a sneer—contemptuously*]

Picture my being scared of that boob all my life!

What did you ever see in him, to marry him? He's yellow!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Frightened by the change in him but attempting a bullying tone*]

How dare you talk so disrespectfully—!

REUBEN

But you're yellow, too. And I'm yellow. How could I help being? It's in my blood.

[*Harshly*]

But I'll get him out of my blood, by God! And I'll get you out, too!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Pitiably now*]

What have I done, Reuben?

REUBEN

[*Bitterly*]

You knew he was in that closet! You led me on to tell! I thought you loved me better'n any one, and you'd never squeal on me to him!

[*He starts to break down miserably*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Goes to him as if to take him in her arms*]

I do love you better than any one, Reuben! I didn't mean—

REUBEN

[*Steps back from her—accusingly*]

And you called Ada a harlot—after I told you I loved her with all my heart!

[*Then a note of pleading*]

Do you mean you didn't mean that part of it—about her?

MRS. LIGHT

[*Immediately furious again*]

Yes, I did mean it about her! I meant it and a lot more!

REUBEN

Then I'm through with you! And as for him—!

[*He suddenly is reminded of something—thinking wildly*]

He went! . . . police station! . . . that'll finish me with Ada! . . .

[*There is the noise of the front door slamming*]

He's leaving! . . .

[*He rushes to the door but finds it locked—pushes and pulls at it, trying to force it open*]

MRS. LIGHT

I suppose you want to run over and warn your fine friends! Fife'll be in a cell before long, please God, and if there was any real justice his girl'd be put in along with him for she's no better than a street-walker!

REUBEN

[*Turns and glares at her*]

I'm glad you're talking like that! It shows you up and I can hate you now!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Breaking down*]

Reuben! For God's sake, don't say that—to your mother!

REUBEN

You're not my mother any more! I'll do without a mother rather than have your kind!

[*He turns from her to the window and looks out. As he does so, his father appears from right, coming from the front door. He is buttoned up to the neck in an old raincoat and carries an umbrella*]

FIFE

[*Still leaning out of his sitting room window, catches sight of* LIGHT—*calls excitedly over his shoulder*]

Here's the old man now! Come quick, Ada!

[*A moment later, just as* LIGHT *comes up, she appears at the window next to her father. Her face is set in an ugly, sneering expression.* FIFE *calls to* LIGHT *in a mocking tone*]

Good evening, Your Holiness.

LIGHT

[*Stops short and stares at* FIFE *with a rage that chokes him so that for a moment his lips move, forming words, but he can't utter them—finally finding his voice, he stammers*]

You—you murderer!

FIFE

[*Nudging* ADA—*with a great pretense of guilt*]

Murderer? In the name of God, has your son—? after he'd sworn his word of honor—!

LIGHT

[*Triumphantly*]

You thought you had him caught in your snares, did

you?—but God was simply using Reuben to bring retribution on your head!

[*In a booming triumph*]

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!"

REUBEN

[*Watching from his window*]

He's talking to Fife! . . . he's telling! . . .

[*Then cursing his father aloud*]

God damn him! I'll show him!

[*He drives back at the door with the weight of his whole body, and it crashes open and he stumbles over it and disappears in the hall*]

MRS. LIGHT

[*Starts after him, calling frightenedly*]

Reuben! Don't! Reuben!

FIFE

[*Enjoying himself hugely*]

You wouldn't give me up to the police, would you—a kind-hearted Shepherd of the Lord like you?

ADA

[*Suddenly flares up into a temper*]

Aw, cut it out, Pop! This has gone far enough!

[*To* LIGHT *with sneering contempt*]

No wonder your son is a sap! Can't you see this is only a joke on you? Why, you poor fish, that murder story is in to-day's *Star*—the name Clark and everything! Pop simply copied that story—and if you go to the police you'll only be making a boob of yourself—but go ahead if you like!

[*As she speaks* REUBEN *runs in from the right. He advances threateningly on his father who is staring at* ADA *stupidly, overwhelmed by the conviction that what she has told him is true*]

REUBEN

Did you tell—?

ADA

Look who's here! I was just telling your old man it was only a murder story out of the paper Pop told you to prove you were yellow! And you are, all right! Don't you ever dare speak to me again! You're a yellow rat!

[*She breaks down, weeping, and rushes back into the room*]

FIFE

[*Following her*]

Ada! Don't waste crying over—

REUBEN

Ada! Listen! I didn't mean—I didn't know—!

[*He takes a few steps toward the window, then stops, thinking bitterly*]

So it was all a lie! . . . a joke she played on me! . . . that's why she made me meet her old man! . . . so she could make a fool of me! . . .

[*He yells at the window*]

It's you who're the rat, Ada! You can go to hell!

MRS. LIGHT

[*Hurrying in from the right. She runs to him and tries to put her arms around him*]

Reuben!

REUBEN

[*Pushing her away from him—furiously*]

Leave me alone! You're to blame for this! You cheated me! I hate you!

MRS. LIGHT

For God's sake, Reuben!

LIGHT

[*Comes out of the state of humiliated stupefaction into which the knowledge of the joke has*

thrown him—bursting into a fatuous rage—to his wife]

As if I have not had enough to bear of humiliation!

[*He points a shaking finger at* REUBEN]

This dunce—this stupid dolt—now I shall be the butt of all their sneers! And to think I stayed my hand—! But wait! I'll show him what a real whipping is!

REUBEN

[*Fiercely*]

You'll never dare touch me again, you old fool! I'm not scared of you or your God any more!

[*There is a blinding flash of lightning.* LIGHT, *his nerves already at the breaking point, gives a gasp of superstitious fright*]

LIGHT

God have mercy!

REUBEN

[*With a sneer*]

What God? Fife's God? Electricity? Are you praying to It for mercy? It can't hear you! It doesn't give a damn about you!

[*There is a tremendous crash of thunder.* REUBEN *looks up and gives a wild laugh as though*

the thunder elated him. His mother and father shrink back from him as he shouts up at the sky]

Shoot away, Old Bozo! I'm not scared of You!

MRS. LIGHT

Reuben! You don't know what you're saying!

REUBEN

[*With a hard, mocking laugh—to his mother*]

What's the matter? Do you still believe in his fool God? I'll show you!

[*He jumps to his father's side and grabs his raincoat by the lapel—addressing the sky with insulting insolence*]

If there is his God let Him strike me dead this second! I dare Him!

[*His father squeals with terror and tries to break away from his hold. His mother screams. He laughs triumphantly*]

There! Didn't I tell you!

[LIGHT *finally tears his coat from* REUBEN'S *grip and runs panic-stricken off right, dragging his moaning wife by the arm.* REUBEN *turns his back on his home determinedly and starts walking off left—with bitter defiance*]

There is no God! No God but Electricity! I'll never be scared again! I'm through with the lot of you!

[*As he disappears off left, the sound of wind and rain sweeping down on the town from the hills is heard*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: *The same as* ACT ONE, SCENE ONE. *The interior of the* LIGHT *sitting room is revealed.*

It is an early morning of a hot day in August. Fifteen months have elapsed.

MRS. FIFE *is leaning out of one of the windows of their sitting room, basking contentedly in the sun. She wears a faded blue wrapper.*

MRS. FIFE

[*Thinking with a sleepy content*]

The sun is hot . . . I feel so dozy . . . I know why dogs love to lie in the sun . . . and cats and chickens . . . they forget to think they're living . . . they're just alive . . .

[*She looks toward the* LIGHT *house—with drowsy melancholy*]

Alive . . . poor Mrs. Light is dead . . . what is death like, I wonder? . . . I suppose I'll have to die sometime . . . I don't want to die before Ramsay . . . he wouldn't know how to take care of himself . . .

[*At a noise in the room behind her she half*

turns her head—then ADA *leans out of the window next to her mother. Her face has a peaked look. Her manner is touchy and irritable and she has lost her former air of flippancy. There is no rouge on her face and she is dressed as if she had grown indifferent about her personal appearance*]

ADA

For heaven's sake, what're you dope-dreaming about now, Mom?

MRS. FIFE

I was thinking of poor Mrs. Light—

ADA

Poor nothing! She hated us worse than poison! She'd have sung hymns of joy if any of us had died! And why feel sorry for her, anyway? She's lucky, if you ask me! Life is the bunk!

MRS. FIFE

[*Looks at her worriedly—with a sigh*]
I wish that Light boy would come back.

ADA

[*Immediately flying into a temper*]
For God's sake, shut up! I've told you a million

times how dumb that talk is and yet you keep on harping—!

MRS. FIFE

All right, Ada. I won't say anything.

ADA

What do I care about that poor fish! He can be dead for all I care!

[*Then, as* FIFE'S *voice is heard calling from somewhere in the house*]

There's Pop howling his head off about something. You go in and smooth him down, Mom. I'm sick of his grouches.

MRS. FIFE

[*As she turns to go*]

I wish you'd make it up with your Pop, Ada. He feels so bad about it. You've kept a grudge against him ever since the night that Light boy—

ADA

There you go again! For Pete's sake, leave me alone!

[MRS. FIFE *disappears meekly without another word.* ADA *stares before her, thinking resentfully*]

I've got a good right to have a grudge against

him . . . what he did that night wasn't on the level . . . it isn't a question of Rube . . . I don't give a darn about him . . . then why are you all the time thinking about him? . . . I'm not! . . . I liked him but that was all . . . and he was yellow, wasn't he? . . . well, maybe you'd be worse if everything was framed against you the way Pop got him! . . . poor Rube! . . . what's he been doing all this time, I wonder? . . .

[*With a sad smile of scorn for herself*]

You poor boob! . . . it must be love! . . .

[*In the sitting room of the* LIGHT *home,* HUTCHINS LIGHT *enters from the rear, right. The grief over his wife's death has made him an old man. His hair has turned almost white, his mouth droops forlornly, his eyes are dull, his whole face is a mask of stricken loneliness. He comes and sits in his old chair and mechanically picks up his Bible from the table but lets it drop again and stares before him*]

LIGHT

[*Thinking dully*]

Another day . . . empty . . . all days are empty now . . . how long, O Lord? . . .

[*He sighs heavily*]

No sleep again last night except for a few min-

utes . . . and then nightmare . . . I dreamed Amelia was in my arms . . . and Reuben came and beckoned her and she went away with him . . .

[*He shudders, flinging off the memory—then wondering bitterly*]

Does that dream mean Reuben is dead, too? . . . what does it matter? . . . ever since that night he has been dead for me . . . but he never gave Amelia a chance to forget him . . . a postal card every month or so . . . each with the same blasphemy . . . "We have electrocuted your God. Don't be a fool!" . . . her last words! . . . "Don't be a fool," she kept saying to me . . . she couldn't have known what she was saying . . .

[*He breaks down, sobbing, and buries his head in his arms on the table*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Reappears in the window beside* ADA. *She is smiling with a doting good nature*]

Your Pop told me to get out of the room and stop looking at him or he'd start breaking plates. My, but he's in a breakfast temper, though! The men at the plant'll catch it—but they don't mind him. They know, like I do, that he's really the kindest man in the world.

ADA

[*Resentfully*]

Oh, is he? I suppose that's why he acted the way he did to Rube!

MRS. FIFE

He couldn't help being mean then. He'd be mean at first to any man he thought you cared for—especially a minister's son. But he'd get over it, you'd see. He'd like to see you happy, before everything. I'm sure he's been wishing for a long time that Light boy'd come home so he could make friends with him.

ADA

Aw, you're crazy, Mom.

[*Suddenly she leans over and kisses her mother affectionately*]

It's you who are the kindest in the world.

[*Then embarrassed—irritably*]

Gosh, this sun's hot! I don't see how you stand it.

[*She retreats into the house*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Blinking placidly in the sun*]

It was awful nice the way Ada kissed me . . . I wish she'd get to kissing her Pop again that way . . . she does it now as if she wished she

was a mosquito with a stinger . . . the screen up in her room has a hole rusted in it . . . I must remember to get it fixed or they'll be flying in keeping her awake . . .

[*A pause—then* REUBEN LIGHT *comes slowly in from the left and stands there, his eyes fixed for a while on his home, taking in every detail. He does not for a moment notice* MRS. FIFE *nor she him. A great change has come over him; he is hardly recognizable as the* REUBEN *of* ACT ONE. *Nearly nineteen now, his body has filled out, his skin is tanned and weather-beaten. In contrast to his diffident, timid attitude of before, his manner is now consciously hard-boiled. The look on his face emphasizes the change in him. It is much older than his years, and it is apparent that he has not grown its defensive callousness without a desperate struggle to kill the shrinking boy in him. But it is in his eyes that the greatest change has come. Their soft gray-blue has become chilled and frozen, and yet they burn in their depths with a queer devouring intensity. He is dressed roughly in battered shoes, dungaree trousers faded by many washings, a blue flannel shirt open at the neck, with a dirty colored handkerchief knotted about his throat, and wears the coat of his old suit. Under his arm he carries six books, bound together with a strap*]

REUBEN

[*Thinking jeeringly*]

Home, Sweet Home! . . . the prodigal returns! . . . what for? . . . I felt a sudden hunch I had to come . . . to have a talk with Mother, anyway . . . well, I'll soon know what it's all about . . . and won't the old man be glad to see me! . . . yes! . . . he'll poison the fatted calf! . . .

[*He laughs aloud.* MRS. FIFE *turns and gives a startled exclamation as she recognizes him. He turns and looks at her for a moment—then with a swaggering impudence*]

Fine day, isn't it?

MRS. FIFE

[*Her eyes mooning at him, with a simple, pleased smile*]

I'm glad you've come home. Ada'll be glad.

[*She stirs as if to go into the house*]

I'll tell her you're here.

REUBEN

[*Frowning*]

No. I've got no time for her now.

[*Then with a peculiar air of indifferent curiosity*]

Are you sure Ada'll be glad I'm back? I shouldn't think she would after what happened.

MRS. FIFE

That wasn't her doing. She's been sorry about it ever since.

REUBEN

[*With the same detached interest*]

She called me a yellow rat—and she had the right dope. I sure was dumb when it came to guessing what she really wanted or I would have—

[*With a cold smile*]

Well, never mind what—but you can tell her I've changed. I've lived a lot and read a lot to find out for myself what's really what—and I've found out all right! You can tell her I've read up on love in biology, and I know what it is now, and I've proved it with more than one female.

MRS. FIFE

[*Preoccupied with her own thoughts*]

It was just one of Ramsay's jokes.

REUBEN

He's a great little joker! And I certainly fell for it. Well, there's no hard feelings. He did me a favor. He woke me up.

[*With a laugh, a queer expression coming into his eyes*]

You can tell him I've joined his church. The only God I believe in now is electricity.

MRS. FIFE

[*Simply*]

Ramsay'll be glad.

REUBEN

[*Indicating the books he carries*]

I'm studying a lot of science. Sometimes I've gone without eating to buy books—and often I've read all night—books on astronomy and biology and physics and chemistry and evolution. It all comes down to electricity in the end. What the fool preachers call God is in electricity somewhere.

[*He breaks off—then strangely*]

Did you ever watch dynamos? What I mean is in them—somehow.

MRS. FIFE

[*Dreamily*]

I love dynamos. I love to hear them sing. They're singing all the time about everything in the world!

[*She hums her imitation of a dynamo's whirring purr*]

REUBEN

[*Startled—looks at her with growing interest*]
"Singing all the time about everything in the world" . . . she gets them all right . . . listen to her . . . she's caught the sound . . .
[*Abruptly he puts down his books and walks up to* MRS. FIFE]
Say, you're all right!
[*He takes one of her hands in his clumsily—then lets go of it, grinning awkwardly*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Sentimentally touched—beaming on him*]
I always knew you must be a nice boy.
[*With a coquettish. incongruously girlish air*]
But you save your holding hands for Ada!
[*Then she half turns around at some sound in the room behind her—in a hurried whisper to* REUBEN]
She's coming! You hide behind those bushes and we'll surprise her!
[*Mechanically, reacting instinctively for a moment as the timid boy of formerly, he runs to the gap in the lilac bushes and hides in the old place.* ADA *appears in the window beside her mother. Her face wears an expression of eager expectation. Her eyes glance quickly on all sides as if searching for some one*]

ADA

[*Flusteredly*]
I'm sure I heard some one . . . it sounded like . . .

REUBEN

[*Almost as soon as he reaches his old hiding place is overcome by shame*]
What'd I do that for? . . . hide! . . . the old stuff! . . .
[*Savagely*]
No, by God! . . . her mother put it in my head . . . but I'll soon show Ada! . . . she'll find out if I'm yellow now! . . .
[*With a swagger and a cold smile on his lips he walks through the gap just as* MRS. FIFE *speaks to* ADA]

MRS. FIFE

[*With a teasing smile*]
Ada, I've got a big surprise for you. Guess—
[*But* ADA *has already seen him*]

ADA

[*With a cry of joy*]
Rube!

REUBEN

[*Walks toward her, the smile frozen on his lips, his eyes fixed on hers*]

Go right up and kiss her! . . . look at the way she's looking at you! . . . she's easy now! . . .

ADA

[*Staring at him, stammers his name again in a tone in which there is now a note of panic*]

Rube!

REUBEN

[*Pulls her head down and kisses her, keeping his lips on hers while she struggles instinctively for a moment, until she gives up and returns his kiss—then he pushes her a little away from him and laughs quietly, his confidence in himself completely restored*]

Well, this prodigal gets the fatted kiss even if "there ain't no calf." Hello, Ada! How's every little thing?

MRS. FIFE

[*Sentimentally*]

That's right. You two kiss and make up. I'll leave you alone.

[*She goes back into the room*]

ADA

[*Is staring at him with eyes that search his face apprehensively*]

Rube! You—you've changed. I—I hardly know you! I shouldn't have kissed you—like that. I don't know why I—

REUBEN

Well, I know.

[*He takes her face between his hands again and brings his close to it*]

Because you love me. Isn't that right?

[*As she hesitates—insistently, giving her head a little shake*]

Isn't it?

ADA

[*Helplessly*]

I guess it is, Rube.

REUBEN

Guess, nothing! You loved me before I went away—even when you were bawling me out for a yellow rat. That was what made you so mad, wasn't it? You were ashamed of loving me when I was so dumb

and didn't get what you wanted and was so damned scared to touch you.

[*He laughs—a self-assured, insinuating laugh that for her has something at once fascinating and frightening about it*]

But you needn't worry any more, Ada. I've learned a lot about love since I left—and I get you now, all right!

[*Then with a sudden burst of threatening assertiveness*]

You're damned right I've changed! I'm not yellow about you or God or anything else! Don't forget that, Ada!

[*Then as suddenly changing to a passionate tone of desire*]

Gosh, you're pretty! I'd forgotten how pretty you were! You make all the girls I've been playing around with look like mistakes! Your eyes are grand —and your hair—and your mouth—!

[*He kisses them hungrily as he speaks—then controls himself and breaks away from her, forcing a laugh*]

Continued in our next! Let's take a walk to-night.

ADA

[*Staring at him helplessly*]

Yes—no—I don't think—

REUBEN

Sure you will. We'll walk out to the top of Long Hill. That's where I was all during the storm that night after I left here. I made myself stand there and watch the lightning. After that storm was over I'd changed, believe me! I knew nothing could ever scare me again—and a whole lot of me was dead and a new lot started living. And that's the right place for us to love—on top of that hill—close to the sky—driven to love by what makes the earth go round—by what drives the stars through space! Did you ever think that all life comes down to electricity in the end, Ada? Did you ever watch dynamos?

[*She stares at him, frightened and fascinated, and shakes her head*]

I've watched them for hours. Sometimes I'd go in a plant and get talking to the guys just to hang around, and I tried everywhere to get a job in a plant but never had any luck. But every job I've had—I never stuck to one long, I wanted to keep moving and see everything—every job was connected with electricity some way. I've worked for electricians, I've gone out helping linesmen, I shoveled sand on a big water-power job out West.

[*Then with sudden eagerness*]

Say, Ada, I've just had a hunch! I know now what drove me back here, all right! You've got to get your

old man to give me a job in his plant—any job, I don't care what!

ADA

Sure—I'll try, Rube.

REUBEN

[*With a cold assurance*]

You've got to, Ada. Because I can't stay on here without a job. I'm broke and I won't live home—even if the old gent would let me. And that reminds me, I better go and pay my little visit. I don't want to see him but I want to have a talk with Mother. I've got over my hard feelings about her. She was so crazy jealous of you she didn't care what she did. I can make allowances for her—now. So I'll be friends again if she wants to—and then you watch me convert her over from that old God stuff of his!

[*He grins with resentful anticipation*]

ADA

[*Has listened with blank astonishment—pityingly*]

Then you don't—? Why, I thought— Didn't they send for you?

REUBEN

[*Unsuspectingly—with a grin*]

Send for me to come home and be good? I never

gave them my address, kid. I didn't want them bothering me. I never wrote, except some postcards to Mother I sent to get her goat—and his.

[*Then picking up his books and turning toward his home*]

Guess I'll go round by the back. I don't want to run into him unless I have to. So long, Ada. Tell your old man I'd sure like that job!

[*He walks to the hedge and then, stealthily, across the lawn and disappears behind the house*]

ADA

[*Looking after him*]

He doesn't know she's dead . . . ought I to have told him? . . . oh, I couldn't! . . . poor Rube! . . .

[*Then admiringly*]

How strong he's gotten! . . . but it makes me afraid, too . . . his eyes seemed to take all the clothes off me . . . and I didn't feel ashamed . . . I felt glad! . . .

[*Defiantly*]

I love him! . . . I want him as much as he wants me! . . . what of it? . . .

[*Then with a shudder she cannot repress*]

But his eyes are so queer . . . like lumps of ice with fire inside them . . . and he never said he

loved me . . . aw, of course he does! . . . he was nuts about me before he went away, wasn't he? . . .

[*Determinedly*]

I've got to make Pop give him that job or he might beat it again . . . he owes it to Rube to do something for him . . . I'll talk to him right now . . .

[*She disappears inside the house just as* REUBEN *slowly opens the door of the* LIGHT *sitting room. There is an expression of puzzled uneasiness on his face as he peers around the half-opened door, then slinks in as if he were a burglar.* LIGHT *is still sitting, his face hidden in his arms on the table, in an attitude of exhausted grief.* REUBEN *does not at first see him*]

REUBEN

Something's all wrong here . . . where the hell is every one? . . . where's Mother? . . .

[*He has stepped on tiptoe into the room and now suddenly he sees his father and a sneering smile immediately comes to his lips*]

There he is, anyway . . . praying as usual . . . the poor boob . . . there isn't a damn prayer ever got him a thing . . . Mother used to make him pray for electric lights in the house . . .

[*Suddenly with a pleased grin*]

That's a good hunch . . . I'll get them put in the first money I save . . . it'll be like bringing my gospel to the heathen . . . let there be electric light! . . .

[*He chuckles, then bends closer to look at his father*]

He must be asleep . . . that's one on him to catch him . . .

[*He speaks with mocking geniality*]

Hello!

[*His father gives a frightened start, as if dodging a blow, and stares at his son's face with stupefied bewilderment*]

Sorry to disturb your little snooze.

[*His father continues to look at him, as if he can't believe his eyes*]

Oh, this is me, all right.

[*Then the fact of his father's changed appearance strikes him for the first time, and he blurts out in a tone that is almost kindly*]

Say, you look all in. What's the trouble? Been sick?

[*Thinking gropingly*]

It's Reuben . . . Reuben . . . but he doesn't seem like Reuben . . .

REUBEN

[*Misunderstanding his father's silence as intentional, immediately becomes resentful*]

What's the matter? Don't you want to talk to me? Well, I'm not here to talk to you, either. I was just passing this way and thought I'd drop in to say hello to Mother. Where is she?

LIGHT

[*Thinking more clearly now—an unstrung fury rising within him*]

Oh, yes, it's Reuben! . . . I recognize him now! . . . the same as that night! . . . cruel and evil! . . . and now he's asking for the mother he . . . my poor Amelia! . . . he killed her! . . .

[*He lurches to his feet and leans against the back of his chair weakly, glaring at his son*]

Murderer! You killed her!

REUBEN

[*Stares at him with a stunned look*]

What the hell do you mean?

[*Then harshly, taking a threatening step forward*]

Where's Mother, I'm asking you!

LIGHT

[*His strength failing him—in a faltering tone hardly above a whisper*]

She's dead—Reuben.

REUBEN

[*Terribly shaken*]

You're a liar! You're just saying that to get my goat!

LIGHT

[*Going on as if he hadn't heard—in a tone of monotonous grief*]

You can't see her—I can't—never—never see her again!

[*He breaks down abjectly, sinking on his chair and sobbing, his face in his hands*]

REUBEN

[*Stands looking at him stupidly, convinced now of the truth and trying to make himself realize it and accept it*]

Then it's straight goods . . . she is dead . . . gone . . . no use making a fuss . . . let him cry . . . why can't his religion buck him up now? . . . he ought to feel sure he's going to see her again soon . . . in heaven . . . I'd like to see her again . . . tell her I'm sorry

for acting so rough to her that night . . .
[*He gulps and his lips twitch*]
I wish he'd stop crying . . .
[*He goes forward and pats his father on the back gingerly*]

Buck up.

[*His father doesn't seem to hear him. He turns and slumps into the chair at the far side of the table*]
Why couldn't I have seen her just once again . . . this is a rotten break . . .
[*He asks mechanically*]

How long ago did she die?

LIGHT

[*Mechanically in his turn—without lifting his head*]

Two weeks ago yesterday.

REUBEN

Two weeks . . . it was about then I first felt that hunch to come home and see her . . . that's damn queer . . .
[*He stares at his father—uneasily*]
He said I killed her . . . what the hell did he mean? . . .
[*Forcing a casual tone*]

What did she die of?

LIGHT

[*Dully*]

Pneumonia.

REUBEN

[*Heaving a sigh of relief*]

Sure . . . I knew he was only saying that to get my goat . . .

[*He speaks to his father in a defensive, accusing tone*]

Pneumonia, eh? Well, it's a damn wonder we didn't all die of it years ago, living in this dump! Ever since I can remember the cellar's leaked like a sieve. You never could afford to get it fixed right. Mother was always after you about it. And I can remember the ceiling in my room. Every storm the water'd begin to drip down and Mother'd put the wash basin on the floor to catch it. It was always damp in this house. Mother was always after you to make them put in a decent furnace instead of—

LIGHT

[*Has lifted his head and is glaring at his son*]

Are you trying to say I killed her? It was you! She'd been pining away for almost a year. Her heart was broken because you'd gone. She hoped for a time you'd come back but finally she gave up hop-

ing—and gave up wanting to live! And your horrible blasphemous postcards kept coming! She blamed herself for your ruin and she wrote long letters begging your forgiveness, and asking you to come home! But you'd never given her an address! She couldn't mail them, she knew you'd never read them, and that broke her heart most of all! You killed her as surely as if you'd given her poison, you unnatural accursed son!

REUBEN

[*Deeply disturbed but trying desperately to conceal it*]

I never gave her my address because I thought she'd only write bawling me out.

[*Then harshly*]

Where are those letters she wrote? They're mine!

LIGHT

I destroyed them! I burnt them to the last scrap!

REUBEN

[*Starts for his father threateningly, his fists clenched*]

You rotten son of a—

[*He chokes it back—then helplessly, with a wounded look*]

Say, that was a dirty trick! I'd like to have read—

[LIGHT *averts his eyes and suddenly hides his face in his hands*]

LIGHT

[*Remorsefully now*]
He's right . . . I had no right . . . no right even to read them . . . how I wish I'd never read them! . . .
[*Lifting his head*]
I destroyed them in a fit of anger. When I read them I realized that Amelia had been thinking of you all the time. And I felt betrayed! I hated her and you! I was insane with hatred! God forgive me!

REUBEN

[*After a pause—dully*]
Did she ever talk about me?

LIGHT

[*Immediately jealous again*]
She never mentioned your name!
[*Then forcing himself to say it*]
I—I had forbidden her to.

REUBEN

[*His face lights up with anger again but he controls it*]

Sure, you had to, didn't you?—so what the hell?

[*Then insistently*]

But—didn't she?—at the last?—when she was dying?—say anything?

LIGHT

[*Fighting a furious battle with himself*]

Have I got to tell him? . . . that she'd even forgotten God? . . . that her last words were his words? . . . even her soul lost to me? . . . must I tell this? . . .

[*Savagely*]

No! . . . I don't owe him the truth! . . . I must make him feel he is accursed! . . .

[*He springs from his chair and leaning across the table, points his finger at* REUBEN *denouncingly*]

Yes, with her last breath she cursed you for all the ruin and suffering you had brought on her—and on me!

[*Then as he sees* REUBEN *shrinking back in his chair, a haunted look of horror on his face, the consciousness of the evil of the lie he is telling overwhelms him with guilty remorse. He stammers*]

No!—that's a lie, Reuben!—a terrible lie!—don't listen!—don't believe me!

[*He stumbles hastily around the table to the dazed* REUBEN *and with a pitiful gesture puts a trembling hand on his head—pleadingly*]

Forgive me, Reuben! You are my son as well as hers, remember. I haven't the strength to resist evil. I wanted to punish you. She didn't curse you. Her last words were the very words you had written her. "Don't be a fool!" she kept saying to me!

[*He shudders*]

REUBEN

[*Springs from his chair in extreme agitation and grabbing his father by both shoulders, stares hungrily in his face*]

What? What's that? Mother said that?

LIGHT

[*Seeming to shrivel up in his son's grip—trying unconvincingly to reassure himself*]

She was delirious. She must have been delirious.

REUBEN

[*Lets go of his father. The old man turns and stumbles back to his chair.* REUBEN *stares before him, thinking excitedly*]

"We have electrocuted your God. Don't be a fool" . . . that's what I kept writing her . . . her last words! . . . then I'd converted her away from his God! . . . the dying see things beyond . . . she saw I'd found the right path to the truth! . . .

[*His eyes shine with a new elation*]

By God, I'll go on now all right! . . .

[*He laughs aloud to himself exultantly*]

LIGHT

Don't, for the love of God!

REUBEN

[*Immediately ashamed of himself*]

I wasn't laughing at you, honest.

[*Then suddenly*]

Say, I think I'll go and visit Mother's grave. There's some things I'd like to get off my chest—even if she can't hear me.

[*Turning to the door*]

Well, so long.

LIGHT

[*Dully*]

Shall I have your room put in order for you?

REUBEN

[*Frowning*]

No. It isn't my room now. That me is dead.

[*Then an idea comes to him—thinking*]

But maybe Mother'd want me to? . . . maybe I'd get some message from her if I stayed here? . . .

[*Then casually to his father*]

All right. I'll stay for a couple of days. After that I'm going to get a room out near the plant. Say, I might as well break the bad news to you. I'm getting a job in Fife's power house.

[*Then quickly*]

I suppose you think I'm doing it to spite you, but I'm not.

LIGHT

[*Dully*]

You have sold your soul to Satan, Reuben.

REUBEN

[*Immediately resentful—with his cold smile*]

Your Satan is dead. We electrocuted him along with your God. Electricity is God now. And we've got to learn to know God, haven't we? Well, that's what I'm after!

[*In a lighter tone—mockingly*]

Did you ever watch dynamos? Come down to the plant and I'll convert you!

[*He cannot restrain a parting shot*]

I converted Mother, didn't I? Well, so long.

[*He goes out and a moment later walks past the front of the house from the right. He is off guard and the callousness has gone from his face, which is now very like that of the boy of* Act One]

I wish she hadn't died . . . but she forgave me . . .

ADA

[*Sticks her head out of their sitting-room window as he passes the lilac hedge. Her face is flushed with excitement, happy and pretty now. She calls*]

It's all right, Rube. Pop's got a job for you. A floor man is leaving Saturday.

REUBEN

[*Startled out of his thoughts, at first frowns, then forces the cold smile to his lips*]

That's great.

ADA

[*Coquettishly*]

Well, don't I get anything?

REUBEN

[*With his cold smile*]

Sure!

[*He goes to her and reaches up as if to kiss her—then checks himself, thinking remorsefully*]

What the hell am I doing? . . . I'm going out to Mother's grave . . . she hated her . . .

[*He steps back, frowning*]

Wait till later, Ada. Well, so long. See you to-night.

[*He turns his back on her abruptly and walks off left. She looks after him, bewildered and hurt*]

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO: *The same except that* REUBEN'S *bedroom is now revealed while the wall of the sitting room has been replaced. It is about half past eleven on the same night—a sultry, hazy sky with few stars visible. There is no light in either house.*

REUBEN *and* ADA *come in from the left. She is hanging on his arm, pressing close to him as if she were afraid of his leaving her, glancing up*

into his face with a timid look of mingled happiness and apprehension.

REUBEN'S *face shows that he also is struggling with conflicting emotions. There is a fixed smile of triumph and gratified vanity on his lips, but his eyes are restless and there is a nervous uneasiness apparent in his whole manner.*

ADA

You're sure you don't hate me now—because I let you—maybe I shouldn't have—but oh, Rube, I do love you so much! Say you love me just as much—that you always will!

REUBEN

[*Preoccupiedly*]

Sure I will.

ADA

[*Pleadingly*]

Put your arms around me tight and kiss me again. Then I won't be scared—or sorry.

REUBEN

[*Mechanically puts his arms around her and kisses her at first perfunctorily, then with reawakening passion*]

Gee, you're pretty, Ada! You've certainly got me going!

ADA

[*Happily now*]

Oh, Rube, when you kiss me like that nothing in the world matters but you! Up on the hill when we—oh, I felt I was just you, a part of you and you were part of me! I forgot everything!

REUBEN

[*Suddenly moves away from her and stares around him nervously—in a strange voice*]

Sure. You forget everything for a minute. You're happy. Then something has to wake you up—and start you thinking again.

ADA

What is it you're thinking about? Tell me and maybe I can help you forget it.

REUBEN

[*Shaking his head*]

I can't forget.

[*Then determinedly*]

And I don't want to. I want to face things. I won't

ever be satisfied now until I've found the truth about everything.

ADA

[*Trying to force a joking tone*]
And where do I come in?

REUBEN

[*Coldly*]
You don't come in.

ADA

Rube! Don't say that—not after— You scare me!

REUBEN

[*Irritatedly*]
Cut out that talk of being scared! What are you scared about? Scared what we did was a sin? You're the hell of an atheist!

[*Then jeeringly*]
And you're the one that used to be always kidding me about being a goody boy! There's nothing to be scared about or sorry for. What we did was just plain sex—an act of nature—and that's all there is to it!

ADA

[*Pitifully—her voice trembling*]
Is that all—it means to you?

REUBEN

That's all it means to any one! What people call love is just sex—and there's no sin about it!

ADA

I wasn't saying there was, was I? I've proved to you I don't—only—

[*Then frightenedly*]
It's you, Rube. I can't get used to you talking like that. You've changed so.

REUBEN

[*With a coarse grin*]
Well, you've got no kick coming. If I'd stayed the same poor boob I used to be you might have died an old maid.

ADA

But—you wanted to marry me then, Rube.

REUBEN

[*Roughly*]
And a lot that got me, didn't it?

ADA

[*Faintly*]

Don't you want to—any more?

REUBEN

Don't I what? Talk sense, Ada! We're married by Nature now. We don't need any old fool of a minister saying prayers over us!

[*Then after a moment's pause—with a forced laugh*]

Say, here's one on me, Ada—speaking of praying. It was out at Mother's grave. Before I thought, I started to do a prayer act—and then suddenly it hit me that there was nothing to pray to.

[*He forces another laugh*]

It just goes to show you what a hold that bunk gets on you when you've had it crammed down your throat from the time you were born! You can't pray to electricity unless you're foolish in the head, can you?

[*Then strangely*]

But maybe you could, at that—if you knew how!

ADA

Is that where you went this afternoon—out to her grave?

REUBEN

[*With affected indifference*]

Sure. What of it?

ADA

[*Pityingly*]

Poor Rube!

REUBEN

[*Frowning*]

Poor nothing! She's dead, and that's all there is about it. You've got to face death as well as life.

ADA

I'm sorry she hated me so. I hope now she forgives us—for loving each other.

REUBEN

[*With his cold smile*]

You mean forgives us for what we did to-night? You don't know her! She never would! But what's the use of talking about it? Who gives a damn? Good night, Ada. I'm tired. I'm going to bed. See you to-morrow.

[*He turns his back on her abruptly and walks off right toward the front door of his house*]

ADA

[*Stands looking after him with bewildered hurt for a moment, then turns back toward her own front door and begins to cry softly, at the same time trying to reassure herself*]

I mustn't . . . feel bad . . . he doesn't mean to hurt me . . . he's changed, that's all . . .

[*She disappears off left. A moment later,* REUBEN *appears in his bedroom and lights the lamp. He sits down on the bed and stares before him*]

REUBEN

[*Looking about the room now, thinking bitterly*]

The last time I was here . . . there's the closet where she hid him . . . here's where she sat lying to me . . . watching him beat me . . .

[*He springs to his feet—viciously*]

I'm glad she's dead! . . .

[*Then immediately remorseful*]

No . . . I don't mean that, Mother . . . I was thinking of how you acted that night . . . I wish I could have seen you after you'd changed . . . after you'd come back to my side . . .

[*He goes to the window on the left and looks out*]

Here's where I was looking out, waiting for Ada to signal on the Victrola . . . gosh, that seems a million years ago! . . . how scared I was of even kissing her! . . . and to-night she was dead easy . . . like rolling off a log! . . .
[*He comes back to the bed and sits down*]
Mother said she was no better than a street-walker . . . she certainly didn't put up a fight . . . marry her! . . . what does she think I am, a boob? . . . she put one over on me and now I've put one over on her! . . . we're square . . . and whatever's going to happen, will happen, but it won't be a wedding! . . .
[*Then with coarse sensuality*]
But it's grand to have her around handy whenever I want . . . the flesh, as the old man would call it! . . . and she's all right other ways, too . . . I like her . . . she got me the job . . . she'll be useful . . . and I'll treat her decent . . . maybe it's love . . . whatever the hell love is! . . . did Mother really love the old man? . . . she must have or how could she stand him? . . . and she made me with him . . . act of Nature . . . like me and Ada . . .
[*He jumps to his feet distractedly*]
God, that seems lousy somehow! . . . I don't want to think of it! . . .
[*He paces up and down—then pauses and appears to be listening for something*]

There's something queer about this dump now . . . as if no one was living here . . . I suppose that's because Mother's gone . . . I'd like to reach her somehow . . . no one knows what happens after death . . . even science doesn't . . . there may be some kind of hereafter . . . I used to kneel down here and say my prayers . . . she taught them to me . . . then she'd tuck me in, even after I'd grown up . . . and kiss me good night . . .

[*As if automatically he slips to his knees by the bed*]

I'm sorry, Mother . . . sorry you're dead . . . I wish I could talk to you . . .

[*He scrambles to his feet—angry at himself*]

You damn fool! . . . what's come over you, anyway? . . . what are you praying to? . . . when there's nothing . . .

[*Then strangely*]

Funny, that hunch I got when I was talking to Ada . . . about praying to electricity, if you knew how . . . it was like a message . . . Mother believed what I believed when she died . . . maybe it came from her . . .

[*Then suspicious of himself again*]

Aw, that's just superstitious junk . . . but why is it? . . . look at how mysterious all this electrical wave stuff is in radio and everything . . . that's scientific fact . . . and why

couldn't something like that that no one understands yet? . . . between the dead and the living? . . .

[*He walks around nervously*]

No use trying to go to sleep . . . and I want to keep on thinking . . . but not in here . . . I'll go for a walk . . . why not go down to the plant? . . . take a look in at the dynamos . . . watching them always helps me somehow . . . sure, that's the stuff! . . .

[*He turns down the light and blows it out and can be seen going through the door in rear*]

CURTAIN

SCENE THREE: *A half hour later. Exterior of the Light and Power Company's hydro-electric plant about two miles from the town. The plant is comparatively a small one. The building is red brick. The section on the left, the dynamo room, is much wider than the right section but is a story less in height. An immense window and a big sliding door are in the lower part of the dynamo-room wall, and there is a similar window in the upper part of the section on right. Through the window and the open door of the dynamo room, which is brilliantly lighted by a*

row of powerful bulbs in white globes set in brackets along both walls, there is a clear view of a dynamo, huge and black, with something of a massive female idol about it, the exciter set on the main structure like a head with blank, oblong eyes above a gross, rounded torso.

Through the upper window of the right section of the building, in the switch galleries, by a dim light, one gets a glimpse of the mathematically ordered web of the disconnecting switches, double busses, and other equipment stretching up through the roof to the outgoing feeders leading to the transmission towers.

The air is full of sound, a soft overtone of rushing water from the dam and the river bed below, penetrated dominatingly by the harsh, throaty, metallic purr of the dynamo.

REUBEN *comes in from the right and approaches until he is opposite the open doorway. He stands there staring at the dynamo and listening to it.*

REUBEN

[*After a pause—fascinatedly*]

It's so mysterious . . . and grand . . . it makes you feel things . . . you don't need to think . . . you almost get the secret . . .

what electricity is . . . what life is . . . what God is . . . it's all the same thing . . .

[*A pause—then he goes on in the same fascinated tone*]

It's like a great dark idol . . . like the old stone statues of gods people prayed to . . . only it's living and they were dead . . . that part on top is like a head . . . with eyes that see you without seeing you . . . and below it is like a body . . . not a man's . . . round like a woman's . . . as if it had breasts . . . but not like a girl . . . not like Ada . . . no, like a woman . . . like her mother . . . or mine . . . a great, dark mother! . . . that's what the dynamo is! . . . that's what life is! . . .

[*He stares at it raptly now*]

Listen to her singing . . . that beats all organs in church . . . it's the hymn of electricity . . . "always singing about everything in the world" . . . if you could only get back into that . . . know what it means . . . then you'd know the real God! . . .

[*Then longingly*]

There must be some way! . . . there must be something in her song that'd tell you if you had ears to hear! . . . some way that she'd teach you to know her . . .

[*He begins to hum, swaying his body—then stops when he can't catch the right tone*]

No, you can't get it! . . . it's as far off as the sky and yet it's all around you! . . . in you! . . .

[*Excitedly*]

I feel like praying now! . . . I feel there is something in her to pray to! . . . something that'll answer me! . . .

[*He looks around him and moves to the right out of the square of light from the open doorway*]

Supposing any one saw me . . . they'd think I was nutty . . . the old prayer stuff! . . .

[*Then arguing tormentedly with himself*]

But I feel it's right . . . I feel Mother wants me to . . . it's the least I can do for her . . . to say a prayer . . .

[*He gets down on his knees and prays aloud to the dynamo*]

Oh, Mother of Life, my mother is dead, she has passed back into you, tell her to forgive me, and to help me find your truth!

[*He pauses on his knees for a moment, then gets slowly to his feet. There is a look of calm and relief on his face now. He thinks reverentially*]

Yes, that did it . . . I feel I'm forgiven . . . Mother will help me . . . I can sleep . . . I'll go home . . .
[*He walks slowly off right*]

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE: *Same as* ACT TWO, SCENE THREE—*Exterior of the power house four months later. It is a little after sunset and the equipment on the roof is outlined blackly against a darkening crimson sky.*

The door of the dynamo room is shut but the interior is brilliantly lighted and the dynamo can be partly seen through the window. There is a dim light above in the switch galleries as in the previous scene. The overtone of rushing water from the dam sounds louder because of the closed door which muffles the noise of the dynamo to a minor strain.

REUBEN *enters from the left accompanied by* MRS. FIFE. *He has grown very thin, his dungarees sag about his angular frame. His face is gaunt and pale. His eyes are deeply sunken. He is talking with unnatural excitement as they come in.* MRS. FIFE *is unchanged. If anything, her moony dreaminess is more pronounced. She listens to* REUBEN *with a fascinated, far-away*

look, as if the sound of his voice hypnotized her rather than the meaning of the words.

REUBEN

[*Insistently*]

You understood all I explained to you up on the dam, didn't you?—about how life first came out of the sea?

MRS. FIFE

[*Nods dreamily*]

Yes, Reuben. It sounds like poetry—"life out of the sea."

REUBEN

It is like poetry. Her song in there—Dynamo's—isn't that the greatest poem of all—the poem of eternal life? And listen to the water rushing over the dam! Like music! It's as if that sound was cool water washing over my body!—washing all dirt and sin away! Like some one singing me to sleep—my mother—when I was a kid—calling me back to somewhere far off where I'd been once long ago and known peace!

[*He sighs with longing, his body suddenly gone limp and weary*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Dreamily*]

That's awful pretty, Reuben.

[*She puts her arm around him—sentimentally*]

I'll be your mother—yours and Ada's. I've always wanted a boy.

REUBEN

[*Leans against her gratefully, his head almost on her shoulder, his eyes half closed*]

Yes. You're like her—Dynamo—the Great Mother—big and warm—

[*With a sudden renewal of his unnatural excitement, breaks away from her*]

But I've got to finish telling you all I've come to know about her—how all things end up in her! Did I tell you that our blood plasm is the same right now as the sea was when life came out of it? We've got the sea in our blood still! It's what makes our hearts live! And it's the sea rising up in clouds, falling on the earth in rain, made that river that drives the turbines that drive Dynamo! The sea makes her heart beat, too!—but the sea is only hydrogen and oxygen and minerals, and they're only atoms, and atoms are only protons and electrons—even our blood and the sea are only electricity in the end! And think of the stars! Driving through space, round and round, just

like the electrons in the atom! But there must be a center around which all this moves, mustn't there? There is in everything else! And that center must be the Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity, and Dynamo is her Divine Image on earth! Her power houses are the new churches! She wants us to realize the secret dwells in her! She wants some one man to love her purely and when she finds him worthy she will love him and give him the secret of truth and he will become the new saviour who will bring happiness and peace to men! And I'm going to be that saviour—that's why I asked you to come—I want you to be a witness! I know the miracle will happen to me to-night because I had a message from my mother last night. I woke up and saw her standing beside my bed—just as she used to when she came in to kiss me good night—and she smiled and held out her arms to me. I know she came from the spirit of the Great Mother into which she passed when she died to tell me she had at last found me worthy of her love.

MRS. FIFE

[*Sentimentally*]

Most people don't believe in ghosts. Ramsay don't. But I do. Has she come many times, Reuben?

REUBEN

[*Strangely*]

Not lately—not since I gave up seeing Ada. Before that she used to come almost every night to warn me.

MRS. FIFE

Warn you about what, Reuben?

REUBEN

That I was living in sin—that Dynamo would never find me worthy of her secret until I'd given up the flesh and purified myself!

[*Then proudly*]

And I found the strength to do it. It was hard! I was beginning to really love Ada.

MRS. FIFE

[*Simply*]

Of course, you love Ada—and you shouldn't act so mean to her, Reuben. You haven't been around in a month or more. She's making herself sick worrying.

REUBEN

[*Intensely*]

I'd like to see her! I'd love to! But I can't. Don't

you understand I can't—that my finding the secret is more important than—?

[*Then thinking with sudden fear and doubt*]

But supposing the miracle doesn't happen tonight? . . . Ada keeps coming in dreams . . . her body . . . I've beaten myself with my belt . . . I can't keep on much longer . . .

[*He sways dizzily on his feet, passing his hand over his eyes—then straightens himself and turns to* MRS. FIFE]

I've got to go in. They'll be missing me. And I've got to pray to her.

[*He goes to the door*]

You wait until your husband's gone home. Then you come in.

MRS. FIFE

All right, Reuben.

[REUBEN *slides back the dynamo-room door a few feet and enters, closing it behind him.* MRS. FIFE *stares after him mooningly*] [*A moment later the door from the dynamo room is opened again and* FIFE *comes out, closing it behind him. He hasn't changed since his last appearance. He starts to walk hesitatingly off right—then stops without looking around him and does not notice his wife*]

FIFE

[*Thinking exasperatedly*]
That damned Rube! . . . there's a queer look in those cold eyes of his lately! . . . by God, I'd fire him to-night if Ada wouldn't make my life a hell for it! . . . but he does his work good . . . too damned good! . . . he's always pawing around a dynamo when he's no business . . .

MRS. FIFE

Hello, Ramsay. You better get home to supper. I had mine early. I had to go out.

FIFE

[*Turns on her with an irritated start*]
Oh, you did, did you? You're always having to go out these days, it seems! I won't have you gallivanting down here at all hours and staring at the dynamos and humming like a half-wit! What the hell's come over you, anyway?

MRS. FIFE

Nothing's come over me, Ramsay. I was talking to

Reuben. He took me up on the dam and told me about how we all used to live in the ocean once.

[*Then in her tone of childish mooning*]

D'you suppose I ever was a fish, Ramsay?

FIFE

Aye, a jellyfish, I'm thinking! You've the brains for that!

[*Then angrily*]

You do too much gabbing with that Rube! He'll addle the little sense you've left! But if you've got to talk to him, make him talk turkey and say when is he planning to marry Ada! Aren't you her mother, and don't you see she's worrying her heart out?

[*Lowering his voice*]

D'you think it's happened between them—you know what I mean?

MRS. FIFE

[*With naïve simplicity*]

Yes, of course it has, Ramsay. She loves him the same as I did you when we—

FIFE

Don't be comparing him to me! I was more of a decent man than he ever will be!

[*In a passion*]

I'll have a talk with that lad and if he don't do the decent thing by her, I'll beat decency into him!

[*He turns from her in a tantrum*]

To hell with you! I'm hungry! I'm going home!

[*He goes off right*]

[MRS. FIFE *looks after him with a placid smile —then she gives the big door a push that slides it open to its full width and steps inside and, as she sees* REUBEN, *stops as she is about to pull the door closed again. He is kneeling just inside the doorway before the dynamo in the foreground, his arms stretched out to it supplicatingly*]

REUBEN

[*Suddenly cries out with a note of despair*]

Mother! Don't you hear me? Can't you give me some sign? O Dynamo, who gives life to things, hear my prayer! Grant me the miracle of your love!

[*He waits, his body strained with suspense, listening as if he expected the dynamo to answer him.* ADA *comes from around the corner of the building at the left. Her manner is furtive as if she were doing something she is ashamed of. She looks worried and run down, although she has made a defiant effort with rouge and mascara to hide this*]

ADA

He must be around some place . . .

[*She moves cautiously to the window and peeks in, but cannot see him*]

I don't want no one to see me . . . I'll knock on the window when I see him and get him to come out . . .

[*Then with bitter self-contempt*]

Here I am chasing after him! . . . but I couldn't stand it any more, waiting . . . oh, what a damn fool I was to give in so easy! . . . no wonder he's sick of me! . . . but he can't throw me over this way! . . .

[*She looks in the window again*]

REUBEN

[*His tense, supplicating attitude suddenly relaxing dejectedly*]

She won't answer me . . . there must still be something I've got to do . . .

[*Then guiltily*]

Maybe she feels I haven't killed all desire for Ada yet? . . . that I ought to face her and conquer the flesh once for all . . .

[*He jumps to his feet and turns to* MRS. FIFE *pleadingly*]

Can't you tell me? You know what she means sometimes.

[*He lowers his voice cautiously as if he didn't want the dynamo to overhear*]

Do you think it's something I've got to do about Ada?

MRS. FIFE

[*Simply*]

Yes, you've got to do the right thing by Ada, Reuben.

REUBEN

[*Thinking with unnatural excitement*]

Then that is it! . . . I'll have to go and face Ada right now! . . .

[*Turning to* MRS. FIFE]

You stay here! I'll be back.

[*He comes out, sliding the door closed after him*]

ADA

[*Turns at the noise of the door closing from where she is looking in the window and calls to him*]

Rube!

REUBEN

[*Whirls around and stands staring at her with strange fixity for a moment, his thoughts seizing on this coincidence*]

It's Ada! . . . Dynamo sent her here! . . .

she wanted to prove I've conquered the flesh! . . .

ADA

[*Frightenedly*]

What's the matter? Don't look at me like that, Rube!

REUBEN

[*Moved in spite of himself, instinctively takes a step toward her—in a queer, detached tone*]

I didn't mean to scare you, Ada. You gave me a start, seeing you all of a sudden.

ADA

[*Looking at him hopefully*]

You're not sore at me for coming, are you?

REUBEN

No. It's as if you'd been sent. Didn't you feel something driving you to come here right now?

ADA

[*Quickly*]

Yes, I just had to come!

REUBEN

[*Strangely*]

It was she who made you come.

ADA

She? Who's she?

REUBEN

[*A lightning change comes over his face. He takes a threatening step toward her—denouncingly, his voice booming like his father's*]

You blasphemous fool, you! Do you dare to deny her! "The fool saith in his heart—"

[*He suddenly checks himself and forces a strange, shamefaced laugh*]

Say, did you get me quoting from the Bible, Ada? That's one on me! That comes from arguing with the old man lately. He's got some fool notion that Dynamo is the devil.

[*Then his expression abruptly changing again—fiercely*]

But I'll make the old fool get down on his knees to her yet before I'm through with him! And I'll make you, too, Ada!

[*This puts a sudden idea into his head—thinking excitedly*]

What made me say that? . . . you, Mother?

. . . not only conquer her flesh, but convert her? . . . make her pray to you? . . .

Listen to me, Ada! To-night the miracle will happen!—and then there will be only the kingdom of happiness on earth—my kingdom!—for us, Ada!

[*Then suddenly grabbing her by the arm*]

Only you've got to help me!

ADA

[*Thinking frightenedly*]

For God's sake, what's come over him? . . . the damned dynamo! . . . it's driving him crazy! . . .

[*She puts her arms around him pityingly and tries to hug him to her*]

I'll do anything, Rube! Don't you know how much I love you?

REUBEN

[*Pushing her away from him—in a stammering panic*]

Don't do that!

[*Then pleadingly*]

Why can't you understand? You've got to believe in Dynamo, and bow down to her will!

ADA

[*Soothingly*]

All right, Rube.

REUBEN

[*Taking her hand—insistently*]

Come with me! I want to explain everything to you—to prove everything!—all this plant means about her—you've got to believe in her, Ada!

[*She follows him off left, frightened but pitying and resolved to humor him. His voice is heard explaining excitedly as they climb to the dam. It recedes and then grows louder as they cross from the dam to the dynamo-room roof, and a moment later he is seen there. He comes forward until he stands by the coping, front. He still has* ADA *by the hand. She follows him, holding back as much as she dares, a nervous look on her face. His unnatural excitement has increased, he looks around him with the rapt expression of one in a trance*]

Oh, Ada, you simply can't help believing in her! You only have to listen to her! Her song is the hymn of eternal generation, the song of eternal life!

ADA

[*Uneasily*]

Rube! I'm scared up here!

REUBEN

[*Turns and looks at her like a sleepwalker for a second—then with a sudden hungry passion*]
You're so damned pretty! God, how I wish the miracle was over and we could—!

ADA

[*Persuasively*]
I'm scared on this roof, Rube. Let's go down!

REUBEN

[*Excitedly*]
Yes, down to her! I was forgetting her! She's waiting for me!

[*Then as she starts to go back the way they have come, he takes her hand again and pulls her through the door from the roof to the galleries*]

ADA

[*Frightenedly*]
Rube! I don't want to go—

[*He slams the door behind them*]

There is a pause of darkness here to indicate the end of SCENE ONE. *No time elapses between* SCENES ONE *and* TWO.

SCENE TWO: *When the light comes on again the interiors of the upper and lower switch galleries are revealed. The lower gallery of the oil switches is a deep but narrow compartment with red brick walls. The oil switches, with their spindly steel legs, their square, crisscrossed steel bodies (the containers inside looking like bellies), their six cupped arms stretching upward, seem like queer Hindu idols tortured into scientific supplications. These switches extend in a straight row backward down the middle of the gallery, but in the dim light of one bulb in a bracket in the left wall only the front one in the foreground can be made out. Against the wall on the right is a stairway that extends backward halfway up this wall, then turns and ascends diagonally toward the left to the upper gallery, and from thence up to the door from the roof of the dynamo room.*

The upper gallery contains the disconnecting switches and the double busses. It is of double width and extends over the switchboard room also. This second gallery, dimly lighted like the one below, is a fretwork of wires, steel work, insulators, busses, switches, etc., stretching upward to the roof. Below the disconnecting switches is a raised platform.

REUBEN *and* ADA *are discovered by the dim light*

of this upper gallery standing just inside the door to the dynamo-room roof at the top of the stairway.

ADA

[*Looking around her frightenedly at the weird shadows of the equipment writhing upward in the dimly lighted gallery—shrinking close to* REUBEN, *who is staring at all this with a rapt, questioning, listening look*]

All this stuff scares me. I've only seen it in daylight before. It looks as if it was alive!

REUBEN

[*Strangely*]

You're beginning to see, Ada! It is alive! Alive with the mighty spirit of her eternal life!

[*Then with a start, he pushes her away from him roughly*]

What the hell are you doing? Don't press against me, I tell you! I'm wise to your dirty game—and I won't stand for it! Don't you realize we're in her temple now!

ADA

[*Pitifully*]

Rube! Please don't talk like that—when you know how I love you!

REUBEN

[*Clutching her arm fiercely*]

You mustn't say you love me in here, you fool you! Don't you know all this is watching—listening—that she knows everything! Sssh! I want to hear if she's angry at me!

[*He stands in a strained attitude of attention, listening to the dynamo's hum sounding from below—then evidently satisfied, turns to* ADA *with a relieved air*]

No, she isn't angry on account of you being here because she knows you're beginning to believe in her! It's all right for you to come close to me now, Ada.

[*He puts an arm around her and pulls her to him*]

ADA

[*Persuasively*]

Please let's go down, Rube.

REUBEN

[*Gently*]

All right, Ada.

[*They go down the first flight of steps. He stops as they get to the bottom and glances up and around him*]

You know, Ada, there used to be times when I was

scared here too—when all these switches and busses and wires seemed like the arms of a devil fish—stretching out to suck me in—

[*He gives a shudder and presses her to him*]

ADA

[*Soothingly*]

You mustn't be afraid. I'm here with you.

REUBEN

[*Pleadingly—pointing to the platform beneath the disconnecting switches*]

Listen, Ada! I want you to pray to her—up there where I pray sometimes—under her arms—with your arms like her arms, stretching out for me!

[*He suddenly bends his face to her face, his eyes devouring it desirously*]

God, you're pretty!

[*He controls himself with a violent effort and pushes her away from him, keeping his face averted from hers—in a voice that is almost supplicating*]

You must pray that she may find me worthy. You must pray for me, if you love me!

ADA

[*Soothingly—humoring him*]

All right, Rube.

[*She goes up the stairs to the platform and stands directly under the switches, stretching her arms up in the same position as the switch arms*]

REUBEN

[*Remains standing below—thinking confusedly*]

Mother would warn me if I was doing wrong . . . Dynamo means all this to happen to me . . . it's the great temptation . . . perhaps she wants me even to kiss Ada . . .

[*He ascends to the platform and stands before her*]

ADA

[*Tenderly and soothingly*]

Why did you say a minute ago, if I loved you? Don't you know I do? Why have you stayed away from me so long, Rube? I've almost died, longing for you!

REUBEN

[*Without looking at her—dully*]

You believe in her now, don't you? You wouldn't do

anything to make me unworthy in her sight, would you?—when it means happiness for me—and for all mankind? You couldn't, could you?

ADA

[*Humoring him—gently*]

Of course not.

REUBEN

[*Mechanically*]

You swear to her?

ADA

[*In the same tone*]

Yes, I swear.

REUBEN

[*Mechanically*]

Then I'm going to kiss you, Ada—just once—only kiss you—she wants me to—as a final test—to prove I'm purified—

[*He looks up at her now and lurches forward with a moan of passion and takes her in his arms*]

Ada!

[*He kisses her frantically, bending her backward and down toward the floor of the platform. She cries out frightenedly*]

There is a pause of darkness to indicate the end of

SCENE TWO. *A short time is supposed to elapse between* SCENES TWO *and* THREE.

SCENE THREE: *As the light slowly comes on again,* REUBEN *is heard sobbing brokenly from the gallery. The interiors of the dynamo and switchboard rooms are now also revealed.*

The dynamo room is high and wide with red brick walls and a row of great windows in the left wall. The floor and an observation balcony which projects into the dynamo room from the switchboard room on the right (one story up) are of concrete. The nearest dynamo, which we have seen previously through the doorway, occupies most of the floor space in the foreground. A steel ladder runs up its side on the right to a platform around the exciter.

The switchboard room is a small compartment to the right of the dynamo room, one story up in the other section of the building. In it are the switchboard and a couple of chairs. It is lighted by a shaded drop light over the desk. JENNINGS, *the operator on duty, a man of thirty or so, is seated at the desk.*

MRS. FIFE *is sitting in the dynamo room just under and to the left of the observation balcony. She is staring dreamily at the front dynamo,*

humming to herself, her big body relaxed as if she had given herself up completely to the spell of its hypnotic, metallic purr which flows insistently through the ears, numbing the brain, charging the nerves with electricity, making the heart strain with the desire to beat in its rhythm of unbroken, eternal continuity.

In the gallery, ADA *and* REUBEN *are still on the platform beneath the disconnecting switches.* REUBEN *is on his knees, his back bowed, his face covered by his hands.* ADA *is standing before him, directly beneath the switches as before. She is bending over him in a tender attitude, one hand reaching down, touching his hair.*

REUBEN

[*Thinking torturedly*]
Mother! . . . I've betrayed you . . . you will never bless me with the miracle now! . . . you have shut me from your heart forever! . . .
[*He groans and beats his head against the floor*]

ADA

[*Pats him on the back consolingly*]
Poor Rube! I love you. You'll be all right, dear.

REUBEN

[*Shrinking away*]

Don't touch me!

[*He springs to his feet, and shielding his face with one hand from the sight of her, runs down the stairs to the lower oil switch gallery. He stops there, looking around him distractedly as if he didn't know where to hide, his thoughts hounded by remorse*]

Mother! . . . have mercy on me! . . . I hate her now! . . . as much as you hate her! . . . give me one more chance! . . . what can I do to get you to forgive me? . . . tell me! . . . yes! . . . I hear you, Mother! . . . and then you'll forgive me? . . . and I can come to you? . . .

[*A terrible look of murder comes on his face. He starts for the stairs, his hands outstretched as if he were already strangling her—then stops*]

No . . . not with my hands. . . . Never touch her flesh again . . . how? . . . I see. . . . Switchboard room . . . in the desk. . . .

[*He dashes over into the switchboard room through the door at left of the gallery. He has the startled and terrified* JENNINGS *by the throat before the latter knows it and flings him away from the desk, tears out a drawer and*

gets the revolver and with it motions him to the door of the office in the rear]

Get in there! Quick!

[JENNINGS *obeys hastily.* REUBEN *turns the key in the lock after him. In contrast to his furious haste of a moment before, he now walks deliberately back through the door to the oil switch gallery. His face is as drained of all human feeling as a plaster mask*]

I won't be a murderer . . . I'm your executioner, Mother . . . that's why I'm so calm . . . [*He glides stealthily across toward the foot of the stairs*]

ADA

[*Worried about him has come down from the platform and is beginning to descend the stairs to the lower switch gallery—she calls uneasily*]

Rube! Where are you?

REUBEN

Harlot! . . . that's what Mother called her! . . . [*He springs up the stairs to her, shouting fiercely*]

Harlot!

ADA

[*She sees the revolver aimed at her breast as he stops directly beneath her—in a terrified whisper*]

Rube!

[REUBEN *fires twice and she jerks back and pitches sideways on the stairs*]

REUBEN

[*Stares down at her body for a moment and lets the gun fall from his hand and begins to tremble all over. He calls pitifully*]

Ada! I didn't mean to hurt you!

[*Then thinking with an anguished appeal*]

Mother! . . . where are you? . . . I did it for your sake! . . . why don't you call to me? . . . don't leave me alone! . . .

[*He turns and runs headlong through the switchboard room, and down the stairs to the dynamo-room floor, where he lunges for the rungs on the dynamo's side and clambers up frenziedly. Up on the platform, he stops for a moment, gasping for breath, stretching out his arms to the exciter-head of his Dynamo-Mother with its whirling metal brain and its blank, oblong eyes*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Dimly aware of him—dreamily*]

What was that noise up there, Reuben? It sounded like a shot.

REUBEN

[*Pleading to the dynamo like a little boy*]

I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! Please, Mother!

[*He throws his arms out over the exciter, his hands grasp the carbon brushes. There is a flash of bluish light about him and all the lights in the plant dim down until they are almost out and the noise of the dynamo dies until it is the faintest purring hum. Simultaneously* REUBEN'S *voice rises in a moan that is a mingling of pain and loving consummation, and this cry dies into a sound that is like the crooning of a baby and merges and is lost in the dynamo's hum. Then his body crumples to the steel platform and from there falls heavily to the floor. There is a startled cry from* MRS. FIFE *as she runs to the body. The dynamo's throaty metallic purr rises slowly in volume and the lights begin to come up again in the plant*]

MRS. FIFE

[*Kneeling beside* REUBEN, *one hand on the forehead of his upturned face*]

Reuben! Are you hurt bad?

[*She turns with childish bewildered resentment and hurt to the dynamo*]

What are you singing for? I should think you'd be ashamed! And I thought you was nice and loved us!

[*The dynamo's purr has regained its accustomed pitch now. The lights in the plant are again at their full brightness. Everything is as before.* MRS. FIFE *pounds the steel body of the generator in a fit of childish anger*]

You hateful old thing, you!

[*Then she leaves off, having hurt her hands, and begins to cry softly*]

CURTAIN

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